

Uncle Sam on the Family Farm: Farm Policy and the Business of Southern Agriculture,
1933-1965

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Department of
Chemistry in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation examines federal farm policy between 1933 and 1965 and its implementation in North and South Carolina. It argues that restricted economic democracy in the Farm State – the full array of agriculture regulations, programs, and agencies associated with the federal government – enabled policy makers to adhere strictly to the principles of progressive farming and parity in the development and implementation of farm policies. These ideals emphasized industrialized, commercial farming by ever-larger farms and excluded many smaller farms from receiving the full benefit of federal farm aid. The resulting programs, by design, contributed significantly to the contraction of the farm population and the concentration of farm assets in the Carolinas. They also steered rural economic development into the channels of agribusiness as a strategy to manage the consequences of those policies. The processes and programs that drove the smallest farms out of business in the early post-war era were beginning to threaten even larger, commercial farming enterprises by the 1960s. In this context, the economic and political interests of farmers became separate from and oppositional to those of industry or consumers and removed incentives to seek common ground. The unwavering pursuit of commercial farming and agribusiness prevented diversified rural development in the Carolinas and contributed to uneven distributions of prosperity in the region.

Using the methodologies of policy, business, and social history, this work draws upon evidence from a wide variety of sources including the papers of government farm agencies, correspondence of farmers, political office holders, and personnel of the USDA. It also consults the farm press and local press, the writings of farm policy leaders, and Congressional hearings and reports. These documents provide a multifaceted perspective on the development and implementation of farm programs in the Carolinas and offers a new look at the contested process through which farm policy was made and implemented in the post war period.

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As the introduction explains, my family and this project are inseparable. For them, a simple thank you could never be enough. I hope they find something to value within these pages.

Introduction

I come from a farming family in eastern North Carolina. My grandparents live on the farm that has been in my family since the 1740s, now owned and operated by my brother and his wife. My father spent nearly a quarter century as a manager of a different farm, the one where I spent my childhood. Cotton, peanuts, soybeans, and grains were the mainstays of this farm, and we continued to grow these crops when my parents began farming independently, renting land and working it alongside the farm they managed when I was in high school. While I was in college, my parents, in partnership with four other local farming families, formed Sandyland Produce, LLC, through which we would store, pack, market, and ship fresh produce. We built a facility capable of curing and storing all of the sweet potatoes the constituent farms grew on a combined 500 acres. We installed a packing line and launched ourselves into the deeply competitive world of the fresh produce industry

Sandyland required the sustained attention of a dedicated manager who would quickly pick up the special skills required for successful vegetable packing and marketing. None of the families involved had scaled down their existing farming activities to accommodate the demands of operating Sandyland. I graduated from college in the spring of 2001, and had no established niche in the business. This made me the obvious choice to take on greater responsibility in the new company, and especially to oversee the day-to-day operations on the packing floor. My parents

handled much of the managerial work while I learned the ropes, but my responsibilities increased rapidly. I stayed at Sandyland for five years, as assistant and then general manager.

During my time there, I began to ponder the questions that form the foundation of this dissertation. Why, for instance, was I the only female packer that I knew? Many women work in the produce industry, completing difficult and important jobs from harvesting to bookkeeping to sales, but no other packing house or packing line managers of my acquaintance – and I knew many packers from North Carolina to Florida – were women. Furthermore, why did we rely on migrant labor in the field and the packing house, and what alternatives were there to participating in a labor system I found increasingly troubling? The structures of produce production and packing for the mainstream market made this system seem inescapable when viewed from the inside, and I wanted to know why this was so. Finally, why were the long-established federal marketing quotas and associated price supports for many of the commodities we grew disappearing? Why have they ever existed at all?

I was conscious of the fact that I was working in agriculture in a time of change, and that my very presence in the occupation I pursued was both anomalous and, potentially, a product or symptom of those ongoing changes. Any number of academic disciplines could have shed light on certain aspects of my questions. But beneath it all I wanted more than to understand the economics or politics of how agricultural markets

functioned in the present. I believed that fuller, more satisfying answers to my questions, with their focus on how things came to be, were best answered by historical analysis. I found the most compelling answers to these questions in examination of the mid-twentieth century interactions between farmers and the state.

My own experiences suggested that this would be a fruitful avenue of inquiry. In the late 1990s, eastern North Carolina's farmers began to explore alternatives and supplements to "program crops," staple commodities such as cotton and tobacco that enjoyed the benefits of federal market stabilization programs in exchange for production regulations. As the twentieth century came to a close, those programs no longer assured shelter from the uncertainties of the commodities market. First came the incremental and tenuous shifts away from production controls included in the 1996 farm bill, commonly known as the "Freedom to Farm Act" (a moniker, which we shall see, had roots in the debates over farm policy in the 1950s). A second harbinger of change was the building momentum of the legal cases against cigarette makers that contributed to a growing conviction that that tobacco marketing supports would soon come to an end. Sandyland Produce was an experiment, undertaken in part as a response to this shifting policy context. Vegetables offered high-value diversification that would help see us through anticipated transitions.

The degree to which the vegetable industry differed from commodity production – from infrastructure development to price stabilization – had to be experienced to be

truly understood. The production and marketing of staple commodities benefited from nearly a century of government intervention. Tobacco warehouses, cooperative cotton gins, and peanut storage and shipping facilities were important local institutions with established histories of a generation or more. Many tobacco warehouses sprang up after the 1915 Tobacco Warehouse Act, and public sources of financing dedicated to agriculture infrastructure development created a process for obtaining credit on terms suited to farm business cycles. From the time of the New Deal, quotas and on-site inspectors, commodity loans and price floors, gave structure of the process of buying and selling. Staple commodity agriculture was not without risk, nor did these programs offer equality of opportunity and access to all farmers. But the markets for regulated staple commodities functioned in predictable and familiar ways, always with the safety net that cushioned many farmers from the impact of market fluctuations and natural disasters. As long as those farmers who possessed marketing quotas stayed within their limits, they were assured that their goods would find always find a buyer.

It is one thing to know that governmental institutions provided important structure to farm production and marketing, infrastructure development and disaster assistance, but the impact of many of those interventions was never so obvious as in their absence. In September, 1999, while my parents' first sweet potato crop was nearly ready for harvest and Sandyland's facilities were under construction, two hurricanes pummeled North Carolina's coast. Hurricanes Dennis and Floyd arrived back to back,

bringing record-setting rainfall, and the ensuing flooding devastated the region.

Sandyland's sweet potatoes, some of which spent time under water and some of which were merely rain-soaked, were badly damaged. In 1999, there was no federal crop insurance for sweet potatoes. The Non-Insurable Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) program offered only limited compensation. While other public programs and private insurance policies responded to the loss of real estate and machinery, the loss of the crop itself had to be absorbed largely without aid. This was a difficult beginning for our fledgling business.

The following year, we completed Sandyland's storage and packing facility, and a new crop of potatoes found a home under its roof. We then took on the challenges of marketing. We grew, harvested, cured, and stored our produce, which we packed and shipped directly to our customers. Vegetable crops enjoy no allotments or marketing quotas, no stable structure that absorbs surplus production. Competition on the basis of price and quality is fierce, and those who cannot compete simply do not find buyers for their crop. Not only are produce markets uncertain and highly competitive, demand fluctuates widely with the seasons, making economies of scale difficult to achieve and maintain. In an effort to increase sales volume during the summer months when the seasonal demand for sweet potatoes is low, Sandyland diversified. We began to grow other vegetable crops, where we met increased challenges of perishability and quality.

While no federal programs regulate or subsidize fruit and vegetable production and marketing in the United States, the policy infrastructure that supports agricultural production and making, which I call the “Farm State,” is present in the industry in many other ways. My work at Sandyland offered a unique view of many different facets of agriculture and agribusiness, and our interactions with the institutions of government. I worked with the local office of the North Carolina Employment Security Commission to find qualified workers. I consulted researchers at North Carolina State University, who developed the sweet potato hybrids we grew and who helped us to understand the problems we encountered in the packing process that shortened product shelf life. I participated in the North Carolina Department of Agriculture’s “Goodness Grows in North Carolina” marketing initiative. I also scheduled product inspections and established and maintained Sandyland’s USDA-approved food safety program. I achieved certification for the company as a supplier of produce to military commissaries, and when we met with administrative challenges in this process, I worked with the office of one of North Carolina’s senators to clear the confusion.

These were the routine tasks of doing business in the produce industry, but they took on additional significance because the policy context of agriculture was changing in these years. The 2002 farm bill terminated marketing quotas for peanuts, and two years later, tobacco quotas followed suit. By no means was this the end of government supports for staple commodity growers, and indeed, established growers received

compensation from the government for the loss of quotas that had become, in the years since the New Deal, an important determinant of farmland values. What was undeniably true was that the old marketing structures of staple commodities were eroding. We recognized this as an end of an era. With some experience in the capriciousness, and occasional impenetrability, of the open market for fresh fruits and vegetables, we waited to see what the end of production controls would mean for staple commodities. In what manner would we meet our customers, without the mediating influence of marketing quotas that brought buyers and sellers together in a familiar, if imperfect system?

I do not know how common it is for a graduate student to eventually produce the dissertation imagined at the outset of her studies, but in many ways, I have managed to do exactly that. This is not because I anticipated my research findings. They have surprised me at many turns. Rather, it is because the foundational questions have remained salient, even as I added new questions to my list. I wished to understand how farmers had come to have such a close relationship with the state, why the changes in farm policy in the twenty-first century were important, and what they actually meant for farm communities. I came to understand the historical processes that created social and economic structures in which I grew up and worked. Policy decisions, founded in the social, political, and economic priorities of the Great Depression and the post-World War II years echoed through the decades to influence how we worked the land and

marketed our produce, how we managed our farms, and who did, and did not, undertake the work of production and management.

This dissertation examines the development of the Farm State in the United States in the twentieth century. By “Farm State,” I mean the full slate of instrumentalities and farm support and subsidization programs that formed the policy structure in which American agriculture occurred from 1933, onward. I argue that restricted economic democracy in the Farm State enabled policy makers to adhere strictly to the principles of progressive farming and parity in the development and implementation of farm policies. These ideals emphasized industrialized, commercial farming by ever-larger farms and excluded many smaller farms from receiving the full benefit of federal farm aid. The resulting programs, by design, contributed significantly to the contraction of the farm population and the concentration of farm assets in the Carolinas. They also steered rural economic development into the channels of agribusiness as a strategy to manage the consequences of those policies. The processes and programs that drove the smallest farms out of business in the early post-war era were beginning to threaten even larger, commercial farming enterprises by the 1960s. In this context, the economic and political interests of farmers became separate from and oppositional to those of industry or consumers and removed incentives to seek common ground. The unwavering pursuit of commercial farming and agribusiness prevented

diversified rural development in the Carolinas and contributed to uneven distributions of prosperity in the region.

Such a result was not inevitable. Contemporary observers recognized the potential of the Agricultural Adjustment Act to expand political participation by marginalized citizens. The New Deal had not only the potential to stabilize the farm economy, but to expand the franchise, democratize access to farmland, and provide mechanisms for direct influence on policy making and implementation by the individuals most directly affected by those decisions. The USDA would regulate the production of selected, important agricultural commodities, but initially those regulations applied only to those farmers who volunteered for the programs. The administrative processes that assigned allotments and kept track of individual farms' production histories remained perpetually at work once set into motion, but the actual enforcement of marketing quotas took place only with the approval of farmers, expressed in policy referenda specific on each commodity. The local-level administrators of the programs of the AAA and its successor agencies were themselves farmers, chosen for the job by their neighbors. Throughout the 1930s farmers on all rungs of the land tenure ladder attended the informational sessions and went to the polls, taking active interest in farm programs as they developed. With the institutions for economic democracy in place, the USDA embarked on what one political scientist of

the 1950s assessed as “the most ambitions – indeed, the most thoroughgoing – attempt” at administrative democracy in the United States to that point.¹

Many factors stymied that potential. Even at its most inclusive, in the crisis years of the early New Deal, full participation in the Farm State’s economic democracy was difficult or impossible for many farmers, especially minorities and share croppers. African-American farmers participated in the AAA’s “economic elections” at a higher rate than they voted in “political elections,” but white landowners lowered the barriers to participation for reasons that had more to do with political expedience than any ideological commitment to the democratic process. While policy referenda enjoyed high voter turnout, the administrative county committees quickly became the province of a few elite farmers, and voter turn-out weakened. Women and black farmers held few elected offices, and administrators and election officials made little effort before the early 1950s to ensure that women voted at all.

These limits to the practice of economic democracy had real consequences for the development of federal agriculture policy after World War II. The unrestricted practice of economic democracy could have facilitated the inclusion of multiple voices and varied points of view into the process of farm policy development. Instead, policy referenda and farmer-elected committees flattened any critiques those participants might have wished to express. Any participation, even when voting against proposed

¹ Reed L. Frischknecht, “The Democratization of Administration: The Farmer Committee System,” *The American Political Science Review*, 47:3 (September 1953): 704.

policies or sitting committeemen, implied approval of the system. Those who did not participate, either by exclusion or in protest, were irrelevant and invisible. They could never question the foundational ideologies upon which federal farm programs operated. Instead of an economic democracy, the USDA created an echo chamber that continuously affirmed its own notions.

Commitment to “progressive” commercial farming and the parity principle in the USDA and Congress created institutional logics within farm programs that narrowly defined worthwhile agricultural endeavors, limited the scope of federal aid to farmers, and separated agriculture policy at the farm level from the broader economic concerns of labor and consumers. A direct and intentional by-product of these institutions’ success in implementing farm programs was the dramatic concentration in farmland assets, creating many fewer, much larger farms over time. As smaller farmers left agriculture they also lost their right to participate in the USDA process of economic democracy. Commodity acreage allotments and marketing quotas, and the farmer committees that administered them, served as effective gate keepers to protected and subsidized markets.

Farm programs and their administrators prevented new farmers from gaining access to federal programs even if they met criteria for experience and education and demonstrated the potential to become full-time commercial farmers. A family farm that was excluded from the stabilizing influence and protective subsidies of the Farm State

contended with steep taxes on commodities it marketed, little or no attention or information from Extension agents, and difficulty in obtaining credit. As the farm population shrank through attrition and exclusion, any remaining pretensions to real economic democracy in farm programs also receded. Agriculture supports were no longer programs for the masses, but only for the ever-dwindling few.

This was not accidental. The ideological foundation that informed farm policy making in the mid-twentieth century was that of “progressive farming.” This was an approach to agriculture production, with roots in the Progressive Era, that deferred to the authority of the agricultural expert. Such experts were not practicing farmers (though many had farm backgrounds), but instead were the newly professionalized and college-educated experts who, from institutional perches in land grant universities and state and federal departments of agriculture, conducted research and dispensed advice in the specialized fields of chemistry, agronomy, economics, engineering, and home economics.² These experts developed “scientific” methods, what we today might call best practices, for nearly all facets of farm life. They used demonstrations, club work, promotional literature, and the press to instruct farming families on scientific methods of seed selection, soil preparation, machinery operation, canning, sewing, and general housekeeping. Using these methods, the experts declared, would make farmers efficient

² Deborah Kay Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

in their production, self-sufficient in their household needs, healthier in body and spirit, and ultimately, more profitable.³

The Cooperative Agricultural Extension Service, officially founded in 1914, made the proliferation of knowledge about scientific agriculture and the promotion of progressive farming its primary mission. The Extension service was an educational arm of the USDA whose agents served as a conduit for scientific agricultural expertise, transmitting knowledge from researchers to farmers. Prior to the New Deal, Extension agents were the most visible and accessible representatives of the USDA at the ground level. Extension's commitment to progressive agriculture shaped their interactions with individual farmers. It was the lens through which agents chose which farmers would receive the greatest share of the Extension Service's efforts, and it was these farmers who most fully participated in the New Deal's expanded FarmState.

The New Deal created new institutions to provide credit, assist low income and landless farmers, and stabilize and subsidize commodity prices. The role of the Extension Service was central to this work, as educator and *de facto* regulator. The Extension Service's ideas about progressive farming shaped the regulatory efforts of the

³ For studies of Extension in the South, see Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton Tobacco, and Rice Cultures Since 1880*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 14-15; Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 49;; Sarah T. Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 13-15. On 1920s efforts to identify and address social problems in the rural United States, and particularly the South, see William L. Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1974).

Agricultural Adjustment Administration and its successor agencies, and informed the terms on which individuals received credit from the Farm Security Administration and its post-World War II replacement, the Farmers Home Administration. In the context of an expanding and evolving Farm State, the ideology of progressive farming also evolved. To be a progressive farmer was to interact with the Farm State, frequently and with some sophistication, not only as a client or recipient of credit and aid, but as an active participant in the process of administration and policy making.

During and after World War II, as the American economy strengthened, the ideology of progressive agriculture further narrowed the possibilities for participation in the Farm State. In a case of political irony, the success of farm programs – if we define success in those programs’ own terms – limited and constrained the potential of economic democracy by restricting the definition of “farmer” to an ever-smaller population of modernized, well-financed, land-owning white commercial farming families. This approach excluded other kinds of agriculture from the protective circle of the Farm State – such as smaller or cooperative farms, or part-time farming, pursued by a diverse rural population.

The restricted understanding of acceptable and supportable farming also limited the ways in which contemporaries understood farm policy within the context of the nation’s wider macro-economic policy. In this period the Farm State solidified its commitment to the “parity principle.” In the years prior to the Great Depression, parity

for agriculture meant achieving equal advantages of collective action and policy protections, particularly the tariff, for the farm sector that the federal state provided for the industrial sector. Parity translated well to the Roosevelt administrations early notions about the Great Depression, that it had its roots in the depressed spending of American consumers. Individual farmers required adequate compensation for their work, on a scale similar to what they could earn as wage workers, without the encumbrances of perpetual mortgages and furnishing debt that plagued Southern farmers, in order to become the active consumers. These new consumers would put industrial workers back on the job. Parity advocates of the 1920s and 1930s understood farming and industry as dependent upon each other.

As the economy recovered and the consumer market expanded along with many Americans' disposable income, farmers faced new economic challenges. They saw their income and profit margins squeezed between fast-rising prices of inputs and more slowly rising prices received for their produce. The 1950s saw a marked loss of individual farms and an attendant growth in farm sizes. In this context, the politics of farm policy cast farmers as an ill-used minority, victimized by the industrial sector and by consumers who failed to understand the importance of agriculture. Farmers felt threatened as they watched their neighbors rent or sell their land, giving up on farming and moving on to other work. Commercial interests in near-by towns, even those who had cooperated with rural elites to drive the New South economy of tobacco and

cigarettes, cotton and textiles, came to see agriculture as a hindrance to progress rather than a help.

Parity became the symbolic language of interest-group politics, one that set up an oppositional relationship between farmers and all other economic sectors. To be in favor of parity was to support the farmer against profit-mongering manufacturers and suppliers and from selfish and myopic consumers. In the New Deal order, where other essential industries enjoyed sanctioned monopolies in their markets in exchange for strict rate regulation, vocal segments of the farm sector demanded parity of public support as well as parity of compensation. The politics of parity demanded the continued subsidization and stabilization of agriculture by the federal government, even when the economic emergency of the Depression in which they had been born was past. The new purpose of farm support was to protect farmers from the rest of the economy, rather than to heal the farm sector in order to stimulate the entire economy.

These commitments to progressive agriculture and to the parity principle affected the development of agriculture and agribusiness in the Carolinas after World War II. In the Carolinas, family-based agriculture was the goal of most policy makers. Post-war political Progressives imagined modernized and commercial farms of relatively small size, working cooperation with each other and using primarily family labor. The policies that emerged from the USDA focused on family management of larger farms that worked independently of each other. Family farms grew beyond anything

imagined in the 1930s as farm programs and related federal policies created incentives to achieve economies of scale.

Simultaneously, advances in technology steadily increased the potential yield per acre of every crop, and fed the perennial problem of over-production. American farmers also faced increasing competition from foreign producers and new synthetic replacements for natural fibers. The AAA and its successor agencies responded to the surplus threat by reducing allotments. Farmers who were able to do so responded to these conditions by purchasing or renting more farm land, accruing larger total allotments, while farmers unable to invest in more land left agriculture. While proponents of progressive farming applauded the exit of low income and part-time farmers from the agricultural economy, the inescapability of the cycle demanded that new markets for American agricultural products be found in order to protect the commercial family farms that federal programs had created.

Farm boosters of the 1950s and 1960s hoped agribusiness was the answer. The integrated system of production, processing, and distribution that includes packers, canners, food service distribution, and retail grocery chains promised to open new markets for farm goods through value-added processing and large scale distribution. State and federal policy makers, as well as farm organizations, administrators of farm agencies, and leaders of land grant colleges in the Carolinas aggressively steered a course of agribusiness boosterism. This piqued the interest of commercial lending

institutions. The bankers to southern industry, such as the Winston-Salem-based Wachovia Bank, saw in agribusiness investment opportunities in expanded processing and distribution enterprises and the potential for profitable rural customers.

A new agribusiness coalition of progressive farmers, commercial bankers, farm supply and machinery manufacturers and retailers, and large scale distributors worked together to direct rural development in the countryside into ever larger scale agriculture and successfully opposed diversified commercial development that could bring an end to the steady flow of federal dollars in support of agriculture to rural communities.

Meanwhile, other parts of the South were becoming the Sunbelt, an archipelago of urban and suburban communities that dotted the southern landscape from Virginia to Arizona who increasingly hitched their fortunes to high tech research and development such as aviation, nuclear technology, and computing, as well as health care and military contracting, and even advanced agronomic research and development.

The Carolinas experienced the development of the Sunbelt and the effects of federal farm policy in tandem, creating a bifurcated economy. For this reason they make an ideal location to study the effects of farm policy in the context of the developing post-war economy. These states had long histories of agricultural commodity production, plantation slavery, tenant and share cropper systems of labor, and extensive, though not exclusive, dependence on non-food staples. North Carolina excelled at flue-cured tobacco production, while South Carolina focused heavily on upland cotton, and the

piedmont region that ran through the central regions of both states had become the heart of United States textile manufacturing. In the 1950s, both states joined the burgeoning Sunbelt. South Carolina became home of the Savannah River Site and the Savannah River National Laboratory, which conducted research and produced nuclear materials for atomic weapons, while North Carolina constructed the Research Triangle Park. The land grant colleges in Raleigh and Clemson produced skilled workers and managers for farms and laboratories alike, and military installations large and small dotted the landscape.

The Carolinas were important to the politics of agriculture on the national stage. Both consistently elected Democrats to Congress, which ensured that the congressional delegations of both states enjoyed the benefits of seniority. They exercised their influence on behalf of agriculture. Between 1933 and 1970, many congressmen and senators from North and South Carolina served on the agriculture committee of the House and Senate. North Carolina's Harold Cooley was chairman of the House agriculture committee for sixteen of the eighteen years between 1949 and 1967. South Carolina's Olin Johnston and North Carolina's W. Kerr Scott sat on the Senate committee. From these positions, legislators from the Carolinas held considerable and consistent sway over the direction of federal farm legislation. Furthermore, bureaucratic innovations in North Carolina resonated throughout the USDA, and South Carolina's strivings for an agribusiness economy set the example of public-private partnership in

the development of family farm-based, vertically integrated, highly capitalized large scale production in the Carolinas.

This study is situated at the intersection of several strains of scholarly work. It draws upon and contributes to rural and agricultural history, southern history, business history, and the political history of the United States. Interdisciplinary fields also inform this work, especially the study of American political development. Such a broad scholarly foundation allows this dissertation to examine the evolution of multi-level institutions of government and the manner in which the society in which those institutions were embedded shaped and were shaped by them.

Rural and agricultural historians have charted the development of commodity cultures, the evolution of farm technology and methods of production, the rise and fall of radical agrarian politics, and the career of the USDA. Several classic studies of American agriculture from the 1940s through the 1970s examine the consequences of government policies and evolving technology on the work cultures and community organizations of American farmers. They demonstrate that in this period, sometimes called the era of “the great disjuncture,” federal farm policies greatly altered farming practice and rural communities by supporting and rewarding technological advancement and increased scale in farm operations. These advancements often came

at the expense of established folk ways and to the detriment of vulnerable populations.⁴

This dissertation builds upon these works by examining the interactions of farmers and the state from a different perspective. I demonstrate that the institutions of the Farm State did not act as outside forces, intervening in local farm matters from above. Instead those institutions were well-integrated into farm communities. Farmers themselves undertook active and important roles in shaping and implementing federal farm policies and programs and thus, in reshaping their communities and their farms.

This work also contributes to our evolving understanding of southern history in the second half of the twentieth century. Southern historians of this period have argued convincingly for the increased importance of urban and suburban politics of the region and the reduced influence of the old rural elites. This historiography examines the

⁴ The historiography of U.S. agriculture is vast and evolving. On change in farming and rural society in the U.S. South, see Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures Since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985) and *Dispossession: Discrimination Against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984); Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987). For the first development of the concept of the “great disjuncture,” see John L. Shover, *First Majority, Last Minority: The Transforming of Rural Life in America*, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976); For the effects of federal farm policy and politics and its effect on the farm business practice and the agricultural economy, see Sally H. Clare, *Regulation and Revolution in United States Farm Productivity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert D. Johnston, eds. *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State: Political Histories of Rural America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Victoria Saker Woeste, *The Farmer's Benevolent Trust: Law and Agricultural Cooperation in Industrial America, 1865-1945*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). On the effects of technology, see Deborah Kay Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

effects of an influx of people and investments from outside the South, and especially the investment of federal dollars in the form of research support, military expansion, and infrastructure development. The economic and cultural ascendancy of southern cities created the Sunbelt, a region populated by skilled and well-educated workers whose political influence increased with political reforms, such one-man-one-vote laws, that curbed the disproportionate power that rural elites previously enjoyed. Vocal urban and suburban voters in the growing middle class influenced state and local politics, and made their mark on the key issues of the era, such as school integration.⁵ The rural South and the effects of farm policy after 1950 is mostly missing from these accounts.⁶ This dissertation brings farm policy and the rural economy back into the equation of southern political life after World War II. I argue that these policies remained important factor steering the economic development in the Carolinas.

While this is a southern story, it is also contributes to a wider discussion about American history in the second half of the twentieth century. A better understanding of post-war farm policy, its mechanisms, and its effects is essential to explaining the role of

⁵ David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); Kevin Michael Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

⁶ Korstad and Leloudis do examine poverty and underdevelopment in rural North Carolina, but their analytic focus is on grass-roots, state, and federal anti-poverty programs and policies, not on agriculture policy. Robert Rodgers Korstad and James L. Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs: The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Poverty and Inequality in 1960s America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

federal government in American life after World War II. As William Novak argued in his essay “The Myth of the Weak American State,” the federal government has accomplished some of its most important, if also sometimes subtle, governing through the exercise of “infrastructural power.”⁷ This is government at the far reaches of the state and at the most local of levels. The apparatus of the Farm State are perfect examples of infrastructural power at work, shaping farm practices and agricultural markets and drawing the individuals most affected into the business of governing in broad-based, localized institutions.

These are also key questions for scholars of American Political Development (APD).⁸ By drawing upon the methods and insights of historically-focused political science, I put the institutions of the Farm State at the center of my story. These institutions do not simply provide the context or a set of rules that influence the actions, values, and goals of the individuals in this study. Instead, these institutions are at the

⁷ William Novak, “The Myth of the ‘Weak’ American State,” *American Historical Review* 13: 3 (June 2008): 752-772.

⁸ Daniel P Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928*. Princeton Studies in American Politics. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001 and *Reputation and Power: Organizational Image and Pharmaceutical Regulation at the FDA*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010; Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Daniel Galvin, Ian Shapiro, and Stephen Skowronek, eds. *Rethinking Political Institutions: the Art of the State*. New York: New York University Press, 2006; Karen Orren and Stephen Skowronek. *The Search for American Political Development* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

center of my questions. Where did they come from? Why did they take particular forms? With what effects?

To that end, this study relies heavily on the papers of governmental institutions. The North Carolina and South Carolina Cooperative Agricultural Extension Services generated copious records of their work. The correspondence, speeches, and other writings of local, state, and national level officials throughout the USDA provides insight into the priorities, goals, concerns, and political maneuverings of these policy makers and administrators. The annual reports of county and state level Extension, Production and Marketing Administration, and Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service offices further illuminate agency objectives, their progress toward implementation, and the manner in which various agencies worked together. PMA and ASCS annual reports in particular offer rare insight into the functioning of these offices at the county level. I use campaign rhetoric, the transcripts of Congressional hearings, and the correspondence of members of Congress to understand how farm politics operated at the national level among the executive and legislative branches of government and within political parties. Contemporary press coverage puts farm politics in context for various constituencies. Scholarly investigations – including M.A. and doctoral theses produced in the 1940s and 1950s and the work of established agricultural economists who joined contemporary farm policy debates – were valuable

sources of data and illuminate the questions and concerns that occupied interested and influential observers as the Farm State evolved.

The correspondence of individual farmers, most often directed to USDA officials and congressional representatives, demonstrates how policy decisions played out on the farm. Additionally, questionnaires and survey responses by farmers, particularly those who competed for or won honors such as the Master Farm Family award provide snapshots of individual farming families at moments in time at which agricultural leaders deemed them to be the epitome of progressive farming success. Letters of advice, appeal, complaint, and distress from farmers across the spectrum demonstrate the manner in which farm policies biased toward creating and supporting the Master Farm failed to support or actively undermined struggling farmers or families whose goals differed from the progressive ideal. Farmer's journals and oral histories help round out the farmers' perspective on the Farm State.

Chapter 1 explores the reasons why the architects of New Deal farm programs included mechanisms of economic democracy in their policies. It looks to earlier agrarian political movements and the influence of associationalism to understand why voluntarism, policy referenda, and democratized administration characterized the early Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and how these processes evolved during the Roosevelt administration. This chapter also examines the flawed and incomplete manner in which economic democracy was actually practiced, often to the exclusion of

minorities and women, as well as vulnerable farmers on the lowest rungs of the land tenure ladder.

Chapter 2 focuses on the politics of parity. It begins with an examination of immediate post-war politics on the left that drew connections between labor, consumers, and farmers and proposed dispensing with parity as the basis of federal farm supports in favor of policies that offered more aid to small farmers and reversed incentives for asset concentration. This chapter then turns to the prevailing narrative of the farm economy that cast farmers in opposition to consumers and demanded parity as a remedy for farmers who were not able to take part in post-war economic growth. The politics of parity locked farm policies into commodity support and production regulation policies that only exacerbated farmers' economic distress over the long term.

Chapter 3 seeks to understand the central role that administrative politics occupied in the debates between different visions for farm policy in the 1950s. The farmer committees of the Production and Marketing Administration and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation service came under fire from the new Republican administration. New rules governed their activities and asserted the authority of the office of the Secretary of Agriculture to supervise the committees' work. Heated debates ensued along two separate but related vectors. One debate focused on the advantages and disadvantages of administrative centralization and the other on party politics. But centralization proved the preference of the Secretary of Agriculture,

regardless of his party affiliation, as the Kennedy administration upheld and even attempted to strengthen the Benson era policies. The tendency of 1950 and early 1960s administrative policies were to further restrict farmer participation in the development and implementation of farm programs, while maintaining the rhetoric of grassroots democracy.

Chapter 4 turns to the administration of farm programs in North Carolina, and specifically the efforts of the Director of the Extension Service, David Weaver, to overcome the challenges of implementing disjointed federal and state farm programs with little unifying leadership from Washington. Weaver and his associates also pursued bureaucratic solutions, rather than democratic ones, to the problems of farm policy implementation while seeking, and failing, to spur a grassroots social movement in support of the Farm State.

Chapter 5 examines the effects of farm policies on commercial farms in the Carolinas. It demonstrates that the ideology of progressive agriculture was devoted to the support of a particular kind of family farm. These farms were commercially focused, 1 economies of scale and vertical integration where possible. They were white, increasingly middle class in their embrace of consumerism and domesticity, and they emphasized family management of the farm rather than family labor. Farm policies intended to support such farms were ill-suited to help smaller, low-income farming families. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, policy makers concluded that small famers

should no longer receive assistance in remaining in agriculture. The politics of “get big or get out” associated with the 1970s USDA was in fact actively at work in the 1950s.

Chapter 6 explores the turn to agribusiness in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the Carolinas. It illuminates the tensions between two potential paths to economic development in the region. One favored a diversified economy in which federal subsidies and infrastructure investments would help the region attract more industrial firms, a strategy that would reduce the importance of agriculture to the local economy. A second path of development would maintain the region’s reliance on agriculture, developing the farm supply and commodity processing and marketing sectors of an agribusiness economy. Agribusiness was attractive to many rural communities because it built upon the existing foundations of rural economies and was better suited than many diversification schemes to the particularities of farm programs that made it difficult for farmers, especially small tobacco farmers, to sell any land without jeopardizing their incomes. A coalition of boosters – comprised of USDA agency works, state government officials, farm and news publications, local Chambers of Commerce, and commercial bankers – for to forge a new agribusiness economy. Their goal was to help local agriculture remained competitive in national and international markets in which even the largest Carolina farms were still comparatively small and inefficient.

Chapter 1. Economic Democracy and the New Deal for Agriculture

The South Carolina Cooperative Extension Service was extraordinarily busy in early 1933. District agent A. A. McKeown made regular rounds to visit his subordinate County Extension Agents, and reported back to his own supervisors in Columbia that, in the face of a worsening credit shortage, nearly all county offices were “overwhelmed with Federal crop production loan applications.” Extension offices had fallen so far behind in their routine work that in March they had not yet issued the 1932 Extension Service annual report or published a formal plan for work in 1933.¹ Perhaps it was just as well that no formal plans had yet been published for that year, because new legislation under the incoming president, Franklin Roosevelt, would soon redirect nearly all of the Extension Service’s resources toward entirely new efforts.

In mid-March, soon after Roosevelt’s inauguration, McKeown and other South Carolina district agents attended a conference in Columbia to map out the state’s response to the new “National Agricultural Relief Bill” then under consideration by Congress. We know this bill as the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933. The bill proposed to institute voluntary production limits on several commodity crops grown in the United States and to guarantee a minimum return on produce harvested within

¹ A. A. McKeown, “Monthly Report, Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, State of South Carolina,” March 27, 1933, p. 2, Box 22, Folder 665, Cooperative Extension Service, Field Operations, 1918-1985, Series 33, STI.

those limits. All of this was in the hopes of reducing the surplus that had driven farm prices to devastating lows. For the program to work, it would have to be implemented on a massive scale, on as many farms as possible. Recruiting farmers to participate and then implementing the many details of the program would require considerable administrative effort, well beyond those that were already stretching South Carolina's Extension offices to their limits.

USDA officials in Washington developed an approach to implementing the AAA that they believed would encourage farmer support and address the administrative challenges the law posed. Extension agents would appoint committees of farmers at the township and county levels. These committees, in partnership with the Extension offices, would do much of the heavy lifting: meeting with individual farmers, securing contracts, and enforcing their provisions. McKeown and his colleagues quickly determined which farmers they would recruit onto local AAA committees. Time was of the essence, as it was spring and farmers were preparing to plant the new crop. "In order to be in a position to get this work under way at the earliest possible moment when the bill is passed we visited all the county agents in the district and conferred with them in reference to the selection of county committeemen and township or community committeemen."² The bill did not pass as quickly as the South Carolina Extension

² A. A. McKeown, "Monthly Report, Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, State of South Carolina," April, 1933, p. 2, Box 22, Folder 665, Cooperative Extension Service, Field Operations, 1918-1985, Series 33, STI.

officers expected. Nevertheless, McKeown assured his bosses that with committee appointments prepared, “we are ready to proceed the very minute we are notified of its passage.”³

McKeown’s words paint a picture of the USDA, at its local levels, poised for action, anticipating the “very minute” in which federal agriculture policies would change and take on the characteristics that defined them for the remainder of the century: commodity price support, tightly linked production regulations and conservation measures, and locally-based program administration and enforcement. The Agricultural Adjustment Act, and other legislative measures that would follow over the next decade, created entirely new bureaucracies and programs that altered and intensified the relationship between farmers and the federal government. These measures also built upon older approaches to agriculture policy and reflected the concerns and priorities of earlier policy makers and farm organizations.

The “farm problem” of the Great Depression was not a new development, nor was the New Deal the first attempt to craft federal policy that would address it. In the years since Reconstruction, as the American economy industrialized and the consumer market expanded, farmers faced economic instability that spawned a social movement and a political party. Numerous private and public approaches to organizing the widely

³ A. A. McKeown, “Monthly Report, Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, State of South Carolina,” April, 1933, p. 2, Box 22, Folder 665, Cooperative Extension Service, Field Operations, 1918-1985, Series 33, STI.

dispersed American farming sector emerged in the period. Many focused on cooperative institutions that could take collective action to address the agriculture's systemic problems. They concluded that the problem was one of supply and demand, or, as one skeptical observer put it, that "the root of all evil is the surplus – the solution, the elimination of the surplus."⁴ Production too often exceeded demand depressing farm prices as the surplus in the hands of processors, grain elevators, warehouses and gins grew. In addition to the supply and demand and problem, policy makers and farmer organizations recognized that many farmers also faced difficulties in achieving access to adequate credit and many were trapped in exploitative labor and land tenure arrangements. For advocates of cooperative marketing, such organization seemed to offer a way out of the over-supply problem, as well as credit shortages, caused by a "lack of orderly" expansion, production, and marketing in the agricultural economy since the late nineteenth century.⁵

In the 1910s and 1920s, federal policy makers attempted to build frameworks that would support cooperative formation and coordination among those institutions and the government. Cooperative schemes of the Populist era had hoped to counter the growing national economic and political power of industrial capitalism. Twentieth-

⁴ Paul. J. Kern, "The Bankhead Experiment," *Law and Contemporary Problems*, 1:3 (June 1937): 362 (quote). See also David E. Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal: American Farm Policy From Hoover to Roosevelt, 1928-1933*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 36-37.

⁵ James E. Boyle, *Farm Relief: A Brief on the McNary-Haugen Plan*, (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1928), 238, 249, 254.

century cooperatives, and the policy makers who supported them, embraced industrialization and the developing consumer economy. They encouraged farmers to organize precisely so that they could participate more fully in the modern American economy. The hallmarks of state efforts to assist agriculture in these years were decentralization and self-government. They created no mechanism for the centralized regulation of commodity production. The role of new public institutions created in this period, such as the Federal Farm Board and the Cooperative Extension Service, was to facilitate goal-setting and coordination among cooperatives and to educate farmers in the methods and benefits of modernized agriculture.

These associative state strategies proved too weak to respond adequately to the circumstances of the Great Depression. The New Deal dispensed many Hoover era institutions. Instead of encouraging cooperative formation in partnership with the government, New Deal agencies, especially the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, made the government itself the institution through which farmers would organize and cooperate with each other. The AAA imposed production and marketing regulations on producers of staple agricultural commodities, a final step that associationalists had considered unwise, if not nearly impossible. While deviating from associationalist efforts in purpose, the New Deal farm institutions did reflect earlier values of self-government and decentralization. They used voluntary participation,

policy referenda, and local, elected administrative committees in order to incorporate the input and participation of farmers into the new farm programs.

The premise of self-government and a “farmer-run program” was integral to the identity and justifications for New Deal farm programs. Economic democracy was the central principle and most important justification for the expansive intervention to the farm economy instituted by the New Deal. In its idealized form, economic democracy allowed production regulation and farmers’ economic independence to co-exist. This was key to the legitimacy of programs that, if fully implemented, would directly affect the productive economic activity of nearly half the nation. Economic democracy was also an important concept for the New Deal in general. It as a feature of labor policy in which workers voted for their union representation and employers were obliged to recognized those representatives. Consumers who monitored pricing and rationing during World War II were also taking part in economic democracy.

The practice of economic democracy in the Farm State fell short of the ideal. Referenda and committee election rules allowed for and even incentivized expanding the pool of voters for farm programs beyond those people who usually participated in southern political elections. Even so, participation by black farmers, women, and all farmers on the lowest rungs of the land tenure ladder was limited. The degree of inclusivity diminished over the course of the 1950s and 1960s as the farm population shrank and became less diverse. No longer necessary to the political justifications for the

existence of federal farm programs, these populations became effectively excluded from the workings of the Farm State.

Economic democracy had the potential to make farm programs responsive to the needs of all farmers. Instead, the practice of economic democracy relied on a circular logic that restricted participation to those who benefited most from the USDA's bias toward commercial farming and allowed programs detrimental to many other farmers to continue under the legitimating cover of a referenda process and active farmer participation in program administration. There would be serious consequences to this restricted and self-affirming practice economic democracy for the development of rural communities and agricultural economies. To understand why, we need to explore the manner in which the government crafted and implemented New Deal farm programs.

Pre-New Deal Farm Sector Organization

The farm economy of the 1910s and 1920s experienced extreme highs and lows that led farmers, farm organizations, and public officials to experiment with a variety of private coordination and public policy measures that would stabilize the market. Cotton was an important crop for the Carolinas, and its history serves as an example of the market instability that many American farmers endured, especially those who grew commodities that relied heavily on export markets. Near the end of and immediately following World War I, cotton sold for the then never before seen highs in excess of thirty cent per pound. Similarly high prices in other commodities, notably wheat, fueled

land speculation and an expansion of farm production in the late 1910s. In the early 1920s, prices fell sharply as demand for American exports fell, a result of increased foreign competition and the strength of the American dollar. In 1921, cotton sold for only half of 1920 prices. Cotton cultivation dropped from 35 million acres in 1918 to only 28.6 million in 1921. But the opening of new lands and the advance of farm mechanization contributed to a new increase in cotton production, which surpassed World War I levels over the course of the decade, reaching 43 million acres by 1929.⁶

The unstable balance between domestic and export markets, competition and currency woes, mechanization and farmland expansion, became boiled down in popular and political understandings of the farm problem as a problem of surplus. In this reckoning, farmers simply produced too much, in excess of what the market could support, and prices would not rise until farmers reduced their overall production of the commodities in surplus. This was no easy feat when the same forces that necessitated the reduction in aggregate production also drove individual farmers to produce more and more. Debts left over from the boom years, often for land that was worth much less than the purchase price, required land owners to keep farmland producing as much as possible in order to pay for itself in some way. Southern tenants and share croppers often had no choice but to plant cotton, regardless of price. They followed the directions of landlords with the knowledge that they could be easily replaced. Land owners and

⁶ David Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal: American Farm Policy from Hoover to Roosevelt, 1928-1933*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 10-12.

tenants alike who might have wanted to plant something else found that cotton was the only acceptable currency for their debts. Creditors, including mortgage holders, often extracted their payments in raw cotton rather than cash. In such a system, individual action had little hope of offsetting the momentum of the system.

American farmers have long considered collective responses to systemic economic problems. In the late nineteenth century, an agrarian social movement formed in response to the difficulties small farmers faced in the growing American mass market and the shifting base of political power away from agrarian communities and toward urban centers and industrial interests. Populism challenged the growing primacy of large-scale centralized industry and finance in American political and economic life. Populist activists opposed railroad, banking, machinery, and supply trusts and advocated for government control of these infrastructures. Millions of farmers, acting, individually, their critique held, could not extract fair terms for essential goods and services when their purveyors monopolized the supply. Populists organized cooperative marketing organizations constructed facilities for crop storage and shipping and marketing institutions, attempting to realize the advantages of economies of scale. Populist politics of the late nineteenth century offered a radical vision for restructuring American society that went beyond concentrating the purchasing and marketing power

of farmers. Populist politics reached its apex in the 1890s.⁷ As a conservative resurgence pushed back Populist successes at the turn of the twentieth century, agrarian cooperative politics also grew more conservative – less focused on social change and more focused on commercial success.⁸

Commercial success without political commitment to Populist economic ideals proved difficult for many cooperatives to achieve. When economics were the only motivation for an individual's participation, cooperatives became vulnerable to freeriding and an internal erosion of collective values. Agrarian reformers and policy makers throughout the early twentieth century observed this trend and lamented that farmers who failed to organize and cooperate with each other were behaving "irrationally." The reality was more complex. It was often a better strategy for a farmer to enjoy the increased prices that cooperatives could create, even if only locally or temporarily, himself remaining outside of the responsibilities and restrictions of cooperative membership. This free-rider problem plagued cooperative ventures and

⁷ The classic account of the populist movement is Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Movement: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). A critical take on the populist movement, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955). On populism in the South, see Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). On cooperatives and economies of scale and the politics of populism, see Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁸ Richard Hofstadter made this point, distinguishing between the "soft" and "hard" sides of what he called the "farmer's dual character." Hofstadter wrote that, "It is my contention that both the Populist rhetoric and the modern liberal's indulgent view of the farmer's revolt have been derived from the 'soft' side of the farmer's existence – that is, from agrarian 'radicalism' and the agrarian ideology – while most farm organization since the decline of the Populists have been based primarily upon the 'hard' side, upon agricultural improvement, business methods, and pressure politics." Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 47.

limited their effectiveness. Furthermore, agricultural cooperatives operated in murky legal waters prior to the 1922 Capper-Volstead Act that clarified how such organizations could coordinate agricultural production and marketing without running afoul of anti-trust regulations. But even under Capper-Volstead a key tenet of the cooperative philosophy remained constant: membership must be voluntary.⁹

While attempts at economic cooperation faced significant barriers to long term success in the 1920s, political organizations representing farm interests flourished. Three groups most prominently claimed the right to speak for American farmers. The Order of the Patrons of Husbandry (the Grange), the National Farmers Union (NFU) and the American Farm Bureau (AFB). The national farm organizations had different philosophies about the nature of farm problems. They also had different ideas about the government intervention in the economy. These groups were influential in shaping farm policies at the federal level throughout the century, and in particular in the 1920s and 1930s while many different potential policy responses to the farm problem vied for support.

⁹ Historians have studied individual cooperatives from the 1910s and 1920s and found that cooperatives that were successful in the marketing mostly achieved that success through monopolistic market behavior and by moving away from the democratic or populist approaches to operating the cooperative. On grain cooperatives in the north, see Hal S. Barron, *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 138-152. On share cropper strawberry cooperatives in California, see Miriam J. Wells, "The Contingent Creation of Rural Interest Groups," in Jane Adams, *Fighting for the Farm: Rural American Transformed* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 96-110. On the California Raisin Growers Association, see Victoria Woeste, *The Farmer's Benevolent Trust: Law and Agricultural Cooperation in Industrial America, 1865-1945*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) and D. Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal*, 15-17, 96-102.

The National Farmers Union generally favored commercial agriculture on smaller scale farms, made possible by cooperation. Only farmers could join, as the NFU did not allow other professionals to gain membership, even if their work was closely related to agriculture. In the years before World War II, the NFU advanced the argument that farmers were a class of their own, one that was specifically in opposition to middle-men in the commodities market and distinctly separate from industrial managers and workers. The Farmer's Union operated some of the largest and most successful cooperatives in the United States in the 1920s, including the Union Grain Terminal Association, generally accepted as the "largest cooperative grain market" operating in the country at that time, as well as a substantial farm supply cooperative.¹⁰

Other organizations favored stronger government actions. The Grange was an older organization with roots in the Populist movement. In the 1870s, the first Virginia and Carolinas Grange chapters worked for market reform in opposition to "monopolistic" tobacco marketing associations. By the 1920s, the Grange had become more conservative, and its leadership supported Herbert Hoover's election in 1928.¹¹

The American Farm Bureau was also a conservative organization that represented the

¹⁰ John A. Crampton, *The National Farmers Union: Ideology of a Pressure Group*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 11, 35. On the NFU in the post-World War II period, see Patrick Mooney and Theo J. Maja, *Farmers' and Farm Workers' Movements: Social Protest in American Agriculture* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 90-109.

¹¹ D. Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal*, 199; Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 34-35. For a sympathetic but comprehensive history of the Grange in the nineteenth century, see D. Sven Nordin, *Rich Harvest: A History of the Grange, 1867-1900* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1974).

interests of commercial farmers. Membership divided primarily between Midwestern and Southern commercial farmers. Initially an organization focused on farmer education, the Farm Bureau promoted scientific agriculture, and formed a close relationship with the Extension Service. Until the mid-1920s, county agents worked for both the USDA and the Farm Bureau.¹² At the county level, the Farm Bureau was a community organization, with branches for women and children, that provided a forum for sharing information and developing community resources. By the 1920s, it was rapidly developing into what has been called the most influential interest and lobbying group in twentieth century American politics.¹³

Facing an agricultural depression in the 1920s, the federal government began to consider ways in intervene in the farm economy, for the first time attempting to craft a unified agriculture policy. The national farm organizations and large cooperatives exercised considerable sway over the shape of these various policies, along with the bi-partisan congressional Farm Bloc.¹⁴ Under the presidencies of Wilson, Coolidge, and

¹² Barron, *Mixed Harvest*, 142.

¹³ On the history of the American Farm Bureau, see: Nancy K. Berlage, "Organizing the Farm Bureau: Family, Community, Professionals, 1914-1928," *Agricultural History* 75:4 (Autumn 2001): 406-437; Christina McFayden Campbell, *The Farm Bureau and the New Deal* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962); Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: The Second Republic of the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1979); Grant McConnell, *Private Power and American Democracy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951).

¹⁴ The Farm Bloc was a group of law makers in the House and Senate who joined to develop and pass farm-related legislation in the 1920s. Notable Farm Bloc acts include the Futures Trading Act, the Packers and Stockyard Act, and the Capper-Volstead Cooperative Marketing Act. The Farm Bloc was in part responsible for the passage of the McNary-Haugen Bill. The Farm Bloc and its members were associated with the Farm Bureau. Walter F. Bell, "Farm Bloc," in Robert E. Dwehirst, ed. *Encyclopedia of the United States Congress*, (New York: Facts on File, 2007), 206-207.

Hoover, policy makers and interest organizations – such as think tanks, trade and professional groups, social welfare organizations, and other “technocratic and scientific elites” -- to build an “associative sector,” that would bring private organizations into cooperation with the federal government to solve social problems and regulate the economy.¹⁵ This was an American vision for a corporatist state.¹⁶ Unlike the tactics favored by Progressive Era reforms, the associative state would not make and enforce new regulations through an expanded bureaucracy or through independent commissions of experts whose decisions carried the force of law. Instead, the associative state would coordinate and help administer private action and voluntary self-regulation. As one historian has explained, the associationalist approach to government held that “through partnerships of the public and private sectors, American society could develop an enhanced ability for self-regulation, self-government, and economic rationalizations. The nation might have national management and forms of economic coordination without creating large scale bureaucracies.”¹⁷

¹⁵ David E. Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal*, 4.

¹⁶ On the links between cooperative farming and corporatism in Europe and the United States, see Woeste, *The Farmers' Benevolent Trust*, and Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1998), 318-367.

¹⁷ D. Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal*, 4. See also on associationalism: Edward J. Balleisen, “Rights of Way, Red Flags, and Safety Valves: Regulated Business Self-Regulation in America, 1850-1940,” forthcoming in Peter Collin, Gerd Bender, Stefan Ruppert, Margrit Seckelmann, and Michael Stolleis, eds., *Regulierte Selbstregulierung in der westlichen Welt des späten 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts / Regulated Self-Regulation in the Western World in the Late 19th and the Early 20th Century* (Frankfurt am Main: 6 Klostermann, 2013); Ellis Hawley, “Three Facts of Hooverian Associationalism: Lumber, Aviation, and Movies, 1921-1930,” in Thomas McCraw, ed., *Regulation in Perspective: Historical Essays* (Cambridge, 1981), 95-123.

The principles of agricultural cooperation found a home in associationalist politics. In the associative state, the government was primarily empowered to act as educator and advocate for cooperative approaches to economic coordination. This was the mission of the Cooperative Extension Service, officially established in 1914 in order to educate rural people on modern farming and homemaking.¹⁸ In addition to promoting scientific agriculture, the Extension service encouraged and facilitated farmer organization on the local, state, and national level.¹⁹ A second institution from the Woodrow Wilson era was the Federal Land Bank. Founded contemporaneously with the Federal Reserve and mimicking its structure, the FLB provided capital for farm mortgages. The FLB also created lending institutions dedicated to financing cooperatives in order to build marketing infrastructures such as grain elevators. For the tobacco industry, the Federal Warehouse Act of 1916 sought to ease the harvest-time glut by providing public warehouse facilities.²⁰ In all of these measures, the government intervened to encourage cooperation, ease credit availability, and stabilize markets, but they stopped short of creating measures to subsidize or regulate production. These were important interventions, though limited. They signaled the development of “farm

¹⁸ Smith-Lever Act, (Full Name: An act to provide for cooperative agricultural Extension work between the agricultural colleges in the several states receiving the benefits of an act of congress approved July second, eighteen hundred and sixty-two, and of acts supplementary thereto, and the United States Department of Agriculture), ch. 79, 38 Stat. 372, 7 U.S.C., 341 *et seq.*, Section 1, (May, 1914)

¹⁹ On the Extension Service as an associationalist approach to agriculture reform and on its mission to promote farmer organizations, see D. Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal*, 18-19, and Barbara Hahn, *Making Tobacco Bright: Creating an American Commodity, 1617-1987*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 162.

²⁰ B. Hahn, *Making Tobacco Bright*, 162-163.

policy” as a distinct area of policy making, much like industrial policy or labor policy. Congress and presidents would began developing legislative agendas whose goals were to respond to economic and social problems understood to be distinctly farm-related or rural issues, requiring their specialized interventions.²¹

The first attempt at guaranteeing minimum prices for agricultural commodities the in the United Sates was the McNary-Haugen Farm Relief Bill. The Grange made passing this bill its “major legislative objective” in the mid-1920s, and it also enjoyed support from the Farm Bureau. McNary-Haugen was highly controversial, and the bill received Congressional approval twice, only to be vetoed by Calvin Coolidge both times. The bill proposed a government guarantee of minimum prices of certain agricultural commodities. The bill obligated the government purchase surplus commodities, but it did so with no reciprocal adjustments to production by farmers. Farmers would continue to be allowed to grow as much as they chose without restriction to and market the produce in any quantity. Farmers would, however, face mandatory “equalization fees,” equivalent to half of the difference between the market

²¹ This is not to say that earlier polices were not responsive to rural needs or did not shape farm economies in important ways. The 1860s creation of the USDA and the various land grant universities created the institutional structure for many farm-related programs at the federal level. The Homestead Act brought expansive former federal lands under cultivation for the first time. However, these were not farm policies in the modern sense in which the stabilization of markets and credit for farmers and the protection of farmers from the forces of industrial capitalism is the focus.

price and the government price on the surplus portion of the crop that government purchased.²²

Opponents of the McNary-Haugen bill feared that even with equalization fees, guaranteed minimum prices would drive farmers to produce more of the commodities most severely in surplus because the bill lacked any mechanism for centralized coordination of agricultural production. James Boyle, professor of rural economy at Cornell University published a lengthy and scathing “brief” detailing the weakness of McNary-Haugen in 1928. Boyle proposed an alternative plan that called for centralized planning by a federal farm board, but stopped short of calling for compulsory production regulations.²³ His proposal was very similar to one that was winding its way through Congress with the support of the new president, Herbert Hoover.

Hoover was a champion of the associationalist approach to state-building, and from his positions as the director of the World War I-era Food Administration, as Secretary of Commerce under Coolidge, and as president he favored cooperative economic organization and mobilization. Hoover made agriculture policy a focus of his administration, culminating in the 1929 Agricultural Marketing Act. The provisions of the act were in large part inspired by Hoover’s experience with the war-time Food Administration, where he discovered that the absence of strong coordinating structures in American agriculture made organized efforts mobilizing production for the war effort

²² D. Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal*, 20, 34.

²³ Boyle, *Farm Relief*, 248-271.

very difficult. As secretary of Commerce, Hoover had been occupied by the notion of “waste,” which for him encompassed all of the inefficiencies of the agricultural economy, found in outdated production methods, unstable prices, and repeated farm crises. He believed that only organized collective action on a national scale could address the systemic problems that led to this waste.

In the 1920s there were approximately eleven thousand agricultural cooperatives active in the United States, accounting for roughly two billion dollars in sales. The AMA was designed to harness and direct the potential power of these cooperatives. The law created the Federal Farm Board whose job was to act as a coordinating body that would facilitate cooperation among these organizations, and in so doing minimize speculation and waste. The eight-member Board was also intended to educate farmers in cooperative marketing and to study market conditions in order to understand the causes of overproduction. In response to prevailing low commodity prices, the Agricultural Marketing Act also created “export debentures” that were intended to, in the terminology of the time “make the tariff effective” for agriculture.²⁴ The AMA was a compromise bill between Hoover and the many remaining supporters of McNary-Haugen. Farm organizations supported it as well. The Farm Bureau pushed for the

²⁴ Export debentures were the a mechanism for tariff levies on imported commodities to be funneled directly to the American agricultural sector, which was thought to suffer disproportionately when export markets contracted in response to American tariffs on imports. Exporters of designated agricultural commodities would receive “negotiable debentures” for the value of one half of the tariff duty on the commodity being exported. Exporters could sell those debentures to importers of other goods, who could use the debenture to pay tariff fees to the treasury.²⁴

inclusion of the Farm Board, while the Grange fought for the export debenture measure.²⁵

The purpose of the AMA was not to offer immediate or even significant price relief. Instead, over time and under the leadership of the Farm Board, cooperatives were to better coordinate production in order to reduce surpluses and stabilize the market. In the interim, the debentures were to provide some income relief by making it possible for the farm sector to benefit directly from tariff protections. This was an issue that animated most farm marketing reform activists and that appeased the concerns of many remaining McNary-Haugenites in farm organizations and in Congress who continued to prefer the abortive Coolidge era bill.²⁶ The AMA proved incapable of adequately responding to the combination of drought, falling prices, banking system collapse, and international depression that overtook the economy in late 1920s. The Farm Boards cooperative marketing policies met with practical challenges and general criticism throughout its existence and it was mostly defunct by late 1932.²⁷ New solutions were desperately needed.

In the Agricultural Marketing Act's place, the New Deal created a Farm State that exceeded the scope of any program imagined by early twentieth-century

²⁵ D. Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal*, 45.

²⁶ D. Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal*, 30-33, 48-49. Debentures faced stiff criticism, but mostly their benefits were not likely to actually trickle down to individual farmers and were instead captured by middlemen.

²⁷ D. Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal*, 130-147.

proponents of corporatism. The Agricultural Adjustment Act was informed by similar understandings of what the farm problem entailed and the philosophy that thoroughgoing organization of the farming sector was the only real solution to the over-supply problem. But the New Deal broke significantly from the associationalist approach in that it sought to organize farmers under the umbrella of the government instead of within private cooperatives. With the election of Franklin Roosevelt, the promoters of associationalist answers to economic problems, especially those on the farm, were replaced by policy makers more willing to expand the government's scope of action and to create and enforce binding production regulations. The New Deal for agriculture would be based upon the tenets of economic liberalism while also reflecting the old concerns of McNary-Haugenites and corporatist policy makers that any regulation of the farm economy must embody the principles of democracy and self-government. The result was a unique experiment in administrative democracy.

Economic Democracy

The New Deal created a farm state of unprecedented proportions. Through a series of related legislation, the government set production limits and using its authority to tax and enforce contracts to reduce the total acres of the most important agricultural commodities in the country. In 1933 the Agricultural Adjustment Act instituted the first federal framework for regulating agricultural production in the United States. Although the Supreme Court found the Agricultural Adjustment Act unconstitutional in 1936,

Congress quickly replaced it with the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, and, in 1938, the second Agricultural Adjustment Act. Supplementing these acts were two 1937 laws, the Bankhead Cotton Reduction Act and the Kerr-Smith Tobacco Control Act.²⁸ The differences between these acts are important and often subtle, but they shared a similarity of purpose. Under these various authorizing acts, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the Commodity Credit Corporation regulated commodity production and subsidized prices. The AAA also facilitated the construction of storage facilities and encouraged the adoption of soil conservation measures. These core functions of the AAA would remain essentially unchanged even as the authorizing legislation evolved and the agency itself changed names. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration became the Production and Marketing Administration after World War II, and in 1953, the PMA became the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation service.²⁹

The AAA was not the only new agricultural institution created by the New Deal. The Farm Security Administration and the Resettlement Administration worked with tenants, share croppers, and landowners facing foreclosure to implement farm modernization and crop diversification methods and to facilitate stable land ownership

²⁸ Edward L. Schapsmeier and Frederick H. Schapsmeier, "Farm Policy from FDR to Eisenhower: Southern Democrats and the Politics of Agriculture," *Agricultural History* 53:1 (January, 1979): 352-371.

²⁹ Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to the production control agency by the name appropriate to the period under discussion. When I refer to the "AAA and its successor agencies," I intended to encompass the AAA, PMA, and ASC.

among the poorest, most vulnerable farmers. The Soil Conservation Service was originally independent of the USDA, and worked with state level soil conservation departments to implement conservation measures combating the severe erosion that was destroying soils in the South and Midwest. The Production Credit Administration created local cooperative banks, seeded with federal money, from which farmers could borrow operating capital. Other institutions joined the roster over the course of FDR's administration, most notably the Farmers Home Administration (FHA), which provided government-guaranteed or -financed credit for rural home mortgages and farm purchases. All of these institutions were integrated into the federal government. They were not independent organizations separate from the authority of Congress or the executive branch.³⁰

This was a significant break from associationalist policy. Proponents of the McNary-Haugen bill and the Agricultural Marketing Act hoped to avoid establishing a

³⁰ Most studies of the New Deal include some discussion of the various pieces of agricultural legislation. A few of the best broad studies of the AAA and other New Deal era farm programs are as follows. For the impact of the New Deal on rural southern society, see Daniel, *Breaking the Land* and Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987). For changes in the farm economy, the mechanisms of the AAA and the Commodity Credit Corporation, and the mechanization of American agriculture, see Sally Clarke, *Regulation and Revolution in United States Farm Productivity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For an analysis of the AAA within the context of "New Deal experiments" in government intervention in the economy to relieve the conditions of the Great Depression, see Alan Brinkley, *Liberalism and Its Discontents*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 17-36. For a detailed analysis of how southern Democrats in Congress were able to influence the details and implementation of New Deal administration (though without detailed analysis of the AAA), see Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2013). On the New Deal and conservation policy, including but not restricted agriculture-related programs, see Sarah T. Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

new a massive bureaucracy to administer farm relief and stabilization schemes. Instead, the government was to act as Hoover described his World War I era Food Administration had, to “centralize ideas and decentralized administration.” While cooperatives encouraged and attempted to incentivize voluntary production controls, under associationalist schemes, there were to be no government-issued and enforced production regulations. Any degree of compulsion in farm production adjustment was undesirable, because associationalists feared that strict, mandatory regulations would lead to a loss of self-government and negate any incentives for developing private cooperatives. A large farm bureaucracy was to be avoided.

New Dealers did not share this squeamishness about bureaucracy. They incorporated voluntarism, cooperation, and self-government into the functions of the new farm bureaucracies they created. The AAA was to be administered locally by Extension agents and committees of farmers from the local community who would draw upon their local knowledge and their relationships with their neighbors to make determinations about allotment assignments. The Soil Conservation Service operated only in areas where farmers voluntarily formed soil conservation districts, which were administered by local committees. The FHA relied on farmer committees to review loan applications, and the Production Credit Corporation issued credit through cooperative lending institutions. The Bankhead Cotton Reduction Act and the second AAA required referenda approval before allotment and subsidy measures took effect. Running

through all of these programs as a thread of voluntarism, in which participation was, at least technically, a matter of choice. To understand the advantages and limitations of this approach, we need to better understand the function of the AAA and the challenges it faced in its early years.

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the Commodity Credit Corporation attempted to curb surplus production and stabilize prices by forming what was, in effect, a very large cooperative, one that had the legal standing to enforce production agreements and that commanded the geographical and jurisdictional scope to organize the majority of American farmers to stabilize the market. The Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 created growers' associations in every county for each of the seven commodities: tobacco, cotton, wheat, rice, corn, swine, and some dairy products. The secretary of agriculture set production goals for each of these commodities for the entire country in 1933, goals that were below the actual productive capacity of American farms.

Farmers who joined the associations signed a contract in which they agreed to reduce their production of regulated and supported commodities by a percentage to be determined by the USDA. The acreage each grower would be allowed was his "allotment," which was a percentage of the average yearly planting on that farm.³¹

³¹ "Allotments" and "quotas" are often used interchangeably in discussions of production controls, but these terms did refer to different mechanisms by which the AAA operated. A farmer's allotment was the total acreage of a regulated commodity crop he could plant without penalty. The quota was the total

Complying with allotment contracts meant planting less than one normally did, and in that first year of allotments in 1933, actually destroying some portion of the crop already in the field. To offset the lost income on the uncultivated acres and to provide an incentive for compliance, the AAA issued acreage reduction payments to growers. The money was to come from new taxes levied on commodity processors. To slow the introduction of newly-harvested crops on the market, ease the rural cash shortage, and support commodity prices, the newly formed Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) would lend farmers money collateralized by their crops at a rate that served as a minimum guaranteed price for produce within their quotas. If market prices rose above the loan rate, farmers could sell their crops and repay the loan. If market prices remained below the loan rate, they could keep the CCC money and turn over the crop to the government, which would have purchased it at a price above that offered by the open market.³²

amount of produce that could be marketed without penalty. Acreage allotments and marketing quotas were determined in relation to each other, but marketing quotas prevented farmers from far exceeding the total amount of produce they should have been able to market based on the land area they were allowed to cultivate in regulated commodities. Very high per-acre yields could be achieved by planting crops in more narrow rows than was the standard. Throughout this dissertation, I attempt to distinguish between allotments and quotas in appropriate contexts, except in direct quotations.

³² For a historical analysis of how these loans were issued and their immediate effects on farm cash-flow and investment in see Clarke, *Regulation and Revolution in United States Farm Productivity*, 162-202. This system, still in use today, is known as “no recourse loan” because the government’s only option if the loan is not repaid is to take possession of the crop. For a modern description of CCC loan processes, See E.C. Pasour, Jr., *Agriculture and the Statelms & Meier*, 1990), 189-190.

The AAA became law on May 12, 1933, and Extension agents embarked on a public relations and informational tour to explain the commodity reduction programs to farmers and to encourage them to sign up. On June 26, A.A. McKeown traveled to Camden, South Carolina, for one in a series of mass meetings he held with farmers in his district. Nearly a thousand people packed themselves tightly into the local courthouse. It must have been an oppressively hot space in the South Carolina summer, but McKeown's audience endured the meeting with unflagging attention. He recalled that, "although the court house was so crowded that every available foot of space was taken up and everyone had to stand in order to see and [hear], I do not believe a single person left until the public meeting adjourned."³³ The scene replayed in counties across the country, in schools and churches and courthouses. McKeown held daily meetings throughout the month, explaining "in detail" the new cotton program to all administrators and participants.

While production allotments went into place quickly, many of the details regarding marketing regulations were not yet in place in May when the AAA became law. This left room for producers and processors to lobby for their interests. Many farmers demanded concrete marketing agreements that would guarantee relief from prevailing market trends. North Carolina tobacco farmers in 1933 successfully forced government intervention when tobacco markets opened to prices below cost and

³³ McKeown, "Monthly Report," June, 1933, p. 2.

significantly below the already low prices received the year before. Growers successfully persuaded the governor to declare a market holiday until they could wring concessions from the tobacco processing oligarchy. Growers, buyers, and politicians alike looked forward to the conclusion of policy negotiations that would structure the tobacco program for 1934. By the end of January 1934, ninety-five percent of North Carolina's tobacco growers signed up to participate in the program. Southern cotton farmers proved more reluctant to enter into AAA contracts than their tobacco producing neighbors. Scholars attribute their hesitation to the complicated land tenure and crop sharing system that characterized cotton production that made participation disadvantageous to many tenants. By the end of 1933, only half of North Carolina's cotton acreage was under AAA contracts.³⁴

This lackluster enthusiasm for the cotton program, which might have been construed as a failure of policy implementation, served as a key defense of the USDA when the AAA faced scrutiny by the Supreme Court. The dire conditions of the farm economy and the strength of the inducements to participate in AAA programs appeared coercive to the United States Supreme Court in 1936. In the case of *U.S. v. Butler*, which found the first AAA unconstitutional, the Court rejected the USDA's assertion that farmers joined the commodity organizations voluntarily.

³⁴ B. Hahn, *Making Tobacco Bright*, p. 167-171. Daniel, *Breaking the Land*, p. 93, 110-114.

The regulation is not in fact voluntary. The farmer, of course, may refuse to comply, but the price of such refusal is the loss of benefits. The amount offered is intended to be sufficient to exert pressure on him to agree to the proposed regulation. The power to confer or withhold unlimited benefits is the power to coerce or destroy. [. . .] The coercive purpose and intent of the statute is not obscured by the fact that it has not been perfectly successful. [. . .] It is clear that the Department of Agriculture has properly described the plan as one to keep a noncooperating minority in line. This is coercion by economic pressure. The asserted power of choice is illusory ³⁵

Just as such voluntary action had failed to insulate the AAA from judicial review it also failed to bring adequate cotton acreage under production control. The 1933 cotton crop was only slight smaller than the 1932 crop, and it fetched similarly dismal prices.³⁶

Therefore, the first AAA offered both voluntarism and regulation in only half measures. The Court and other critical observers of the Administration found it both ineffective in its work and indigenious in its assertions that participation was voluntary.

The first Agricultural Adjustment Act was thus proved to be a transitional step between associationalist resistance to compulsion and the compulsory, but popularly approved programs that began the following year. The 1934 Bankhead Cotton Control act instituted compulsory acreage reductions by severely taxing cotton marketed in excess of quotas. In the same year, the Kerr-Smith Tobacco Control Act instituted similar policies for tobacco. Those who favored the bill claimed that these compulsory controls were actually instituted in response to popular demand by farmers who wished

³⁵ *United States v. Butler*, 297 U.S. 1, January 6, 1936.

³⁶ Paul J. Kern, "The Bankhead Experiment," 362-363.

to expand “cooperation” (never “compliance”) with the AAA.³⁷ The provisions of the Bankhead Act were set to expire after two years, but even the second year would not be enforced without approval of the majority of cotton growers.³⁸ In Georgia, Arthur Raper found that farmland owners overwhelmingly favored the continued application of the Bankhead Act, and that they influenced their tenants to vote the same. “On election day the farmers swarmed to the polls and expressed themselves overwhelmingly in favor of the bill.”³⁹ Their support derived from the much improved 1934 cotton process, although Raper observed that it the improvement in the market was more likely a result of a devastating drought in Texas than the provisions of the Bankhead Act.

The policy referenda that defined the Bankhead and Kerr-Smith acts became permanent features of the second AAA, enacted in 1938, repeated regularly on most regulated commodities. First we will examine how these referenda were designed to work, and then look more closely at serious problems that undermined their effectiveness as tools of democracy. The office of the Secretary of Agriculture determined which staple commodity crops would benefit from subsidy support. Surplus supplies on hand in public and private warehouses exceeding twenty percent of “normal usage” automatically triggered the Secretary’s office to set a national allotment

³⁷ Kern, 362; Robert E. Martin, “The Referendum Process in the Agricultural Adjustment Program of the United States,” *Agricultural History* 25:1 (Jan 1951): 36.

³⁸ Robert E. Martin, “The Referendum Process in the Agricultural Adjustment Program of the United States,” *Agricultural History* 25:1 (Jan 1951): 36.

³⁹ Arthur F. Raper, *Preface to Peasantry: A Tale of Two Black Belt Counties*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1936), p. 250-251.

and implement marketing quotas and price supports. The Secretary based the total, national allotment and marketing targets based on the projected needs of industry and the military and anticipated opportunities for export. The Secretary's price support plans did not become binding until they received approval from a two-thirds majority of growers of each individual commodity in referenda held around the country.⁴⁰

Conducting farm program referenda was an annual task for local offices of the AAA and its successor agencies. These offices partnered with the Extension Service to educate farmers about the details of the policy measures up for approval and to encourage voter participation. Instructions of Extension officials for one wheat program referendum stated that, "it is essential that all wheat farmers understand the operation of marketing quotas. They must know just what will happen if marketing quotas are approved and what will happen if they are disapproved."⁴¹ While the Extension Service

⁴⁰ Under Bankhead-Jones, there had been a provision that the measure had to receive the support of 2/3 of growers or of growers representing ¾ of total acreage, so a smaller percentage of larger farmers could approve the measure. This acreage provision seems to have fallen away when the referenda were made part of the second AAA.

⁴¹ David Weaver to All County Agents, July 23, 1953, Box 8, Folder "County Agents, 1953," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU. Educational materials included pamphlets that explained the reasons for the referenda and the specific provisions of the program as proposed by the Secretary's office. Regarding the 1953 wheat referenda, growers read that a yes vote would affirm marketing quotas, established price support at ninety percent of parity. Additionally, "quotas can be expected to hold down production, helping to bring supplies more nearly in line with the effective market demand." If the measure was not approved, farmers would face no marketing quota restriction, but they would be asked to observe acreages allotments, in return for which they could be eligible for price supports at 50 percent of parity in the event of a precipitous decline in wheat prices (and no price support at all for exceeding their normal allotment.) In the event of a no vote, the pamphlet warned farmer that "production can be expected to continue at higher levels – possibly adding to the wheat surplus." ("The Wheat Referendum . . ." U.S. Department of Agriculture, July 1953, Box 8, Folder "County Agents, 1953," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE CORN REFERENDUM

Q. What is the purpose of the corn referendum?

A. To determine the corn program which is to be available to farmers for 1959 and later years. The choice will be between the present program of acreage allotments and price supports, and a new program in which there would be no acreage allotments and price supports would be determined on a different basis.

Q. Who is eligible to vote?

A. In general, anyone who produced corn in the 1958 commercial corn area or had an interest in such a corn crop in 1958 is eligible to vote. In addition, a corn producer may vote in case he had a 1958 allotment but produced no corn; planted corn but did not harvest it; or placed his 1958 corn allotment in the Soil Bank.

Q. When will the referendum be held?

A. On Tuesday, November 25.

Q. Is a two-thirds vote required as in the 1956 corn referendum?

A. No, a simple majority will decide.

Q. Where do I vote?

A. At your local community polling place as designated by your County ASC Committee.

Q. What if I will be out of the area on the day of the referendum?

A. Advance voting by mail is permitted in such cases. Check with the ASC Office.

Q. Where can I get additional information?

A. From your ASC community committeeman; county ASC office, or county agricultural agent of the Extension Service.

**THE CHOICE IS UP TO YOU AS A CORN
GROWER—BE SURE TO VOTE**

PA-383

Issued October 1958

THE CORN REFERENDUM—



An Important Decision For Corn Producers

Corn growers themselves will determine the corn program which will be in effect in 1959 and later years.

On November 25, 1958, growers will vote in a referendum at local polling places in the 932 counties of the 1958 commercial corn area. It will be their opportunity to help make an important decision—and to assure that a decision is made which is broadly representative of corn producers' views.

The referendum choice is between two alternative programs, as offered by Congress in the Agricultural Act of 1958. They are designated as Program No. 1 (a new program, with price supports on all corn and without acreage allotments—and with support levels determined on a new basis) and Program No. 2 (essentially the same program which has been in effect in recent years).

The inside pages of this folder explain the alternative programs in more detail.

A majority of the farmers who vote in the referendum will determine whether Program No. 1 or Program No. 2 will be available after this year.

**IT'S UP TO CORN FARMERS TO DECIDE
NOVEMBER 25**

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Figure 1: USDA Informational Pamphlet for 1958 Corn Referendum.⁴²

⁴² USDA, "The Corn Referendum: An Important Decision for Corn Growers," Publication PA-383 October 1958, Box 6, Folder "Circular Letters July – December 1958," UA102.01, NCSU. Used with permission. This informational pamphlet is typical of the literature distributed by USDA offices advertising commodity program referenda and explaining how the process would be conducted. The inside pages explained the specific regulation up for approval in more detail.

could not explicitly urge voters to vote in favor of marketing quotas, Extension's tacit support for these measures was generally understood. In a 1947 open letter from the North Carolina Farm Bureau executive vice president to the Extension Service, published in the *Extension Farm-News*, the Farm Bureau expressed gratitude to the organization for its persuasive efforts in the tobacco referendum held that spring. "I think the results clearly demonstrated the effective manner that you people used in placing the facts before the farmers. I never worry about the outcome of any question of this kind when properly presented to our farmers."⁴³

For federal farm agency leaders, strong voter turnout was more important than the results of a given referendum. North Carolina Extension director David Weaver argued that active participation of all eligible farmers in allotment referenda was essential to maintaining the legitimacy of farm programs. In the early 1950s, Weaver explained that "emphasis has been placed upon the idea that if farmers are to have their own program, they must be the ones that make it. We have stressed the fact that a large vote will point out to everyone that farm people are capable of having their own program."⁴⁴ Weaver believed that participation by farmers should be the defining feature of all farm programs, and he put this principle to work in Extension programs in

⁴³ R. Frank Shaw, quoted in "Farm Bureau Thanks Extension for Help in Flue-Cured Vote," *Extension Farm-News*, 32:8 (April, 1947): 3, Box 25, Folder "Home Demonstration Annual Reports, 1947," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, 1908-2007, NCSU.

⁴⁴ David Weaver to M.L. Wilson, July 18, 1952, Box 19, Folder "Wilson, M.L., 1948-1952," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

his state. In this belief, Weaver demonstrated the persistence with which self-government remained the key to the identity and legitimation of farm programs in the post-war period. As these programs neared the end of their second decade, it remained essential that eligible farmers continued to be actively engaged in the process of the Farm State.

The North Carolina Extension Service incorporated farmer participation into local programs in order to perpetuate and strengthen the practice of self-government in the Farm State. "Nickels for Know-How" was one such local program that levied a check-off-type fee on all seed and fertilizer sales in North Carolina to provide supplemental funding for agronomic and horticultural research by the Extension Service. The check-off measure underwent annual referenda, in which all purchasers of these products were eligible to vote. This included young farmers below the official age of voter of eligibility for political elections. Weaver viewed this as an opportunity for youth to practice the habit of voting for farm program initiatives and to urge their parents to do the same.⁴⁵ The importance of "Nickels for Know-How," according to Weaver, extended beyond the benefits of additional research funding for the Extension

⁴⁵ David Weaver to All Extension Agents, September 27, 1954, Box 8, Folder "Co. Agents, 1954," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU. North Carolina Cooperative Leaders of the Nickels for Know-How program expressed the same anxiety about voter turn outs as did allotment referenda organizers. At a meeting of the North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies, former North Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture L.Y. Ballentine was "pleased" by the 93% favorable vote in favor of maintaining the program, but "distressed about the number voting." He urged that "an effort should begin at once to impress upon the people the importance of an expression by them in this referendum, the next time it is held, as it is just as essential to have a large number voting as a good percentage in favor of the program."

Service. "Here is an outstandingly successful program conducted by farm people in the interest of their own welfare. It may well serve as a pattern for even more important matters. Farm people must learn to work together and support a common program. 'Nickels for Know-How' . . . not only demonstrates to farm people that they can and are working together, but it is an outstanding example to be observed by the non-farm people."⁴⁶ The relevance to the allotment and conservation programs was clear. Nickels for Know-How was a practice ground for the important work organization and participation required by allotment and subsidy programs.

Voter eligibility for federal farm programs was more restricted than the locally run Nickels-for-Knowhow. Any person with "an interest in" – that is, a financial interest in – a regulated commodity during the previous crop year was eligible to vote in individual commodity referenda. Farmers with an eligible interest included landowners, tenants, and share croppers, but what should have been a simple definition proved open to interpretation. For instance, could farmers' wives vote in these referenda? They could, but many did not. After 1950, agency personnel began to target those women as an under-utilized source of voters from which to bolster turnout. In the run-up to the 1951 flue-cured tobacco program referendum, North Carolina's State Home Demonstration Leader, Ruth Current, instructed all of her Home Demonstration Agents to urge women to vote. Other women in leadership and public roles worked the

⁴⁶ David Weaver to All Extension Agents, September 27, 1954, Box 8, Folder "Co. Agents, 1954," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

radio waves to reach farm women with information about the flue-cured program and the news of their eligibility to vote. The President of the North Carolina Federation of Home Demonstration Clubs gave a “radio talk” on the subject, and May White Scott, the wife of Senator Kerr Scott and former first lady of North Carolina, “made a broadcast urging eligible farm women to vote and get their men folks to vote.”⁴⁷

The importance of high voter participation made AAA referenda more open to black voter participation than were the political elections of the same period. In the 1940s, Robert Earl Martin, a University of Chicago political science graduate student, conducted an in-depth study of two counties in the Carolinas: Wilson, in North Carolina, and Darlington, in South Carolina.⁴⁸ Martin surveyed, as nearly as possible, every farmer in each of the two counties, inquiring into their voting habits and attitudes regarding AAA programs, administration, and participation. Martin found that black

⁴⁷ David Waver to M.L. Wilson, July 18, 1952, Box 19, Folder “Wilson, M.L., 1948-1952,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU. Determining women’s eligibility to vote could be tricky. The national office of the PMA distributed guidelines for referendum in 1952 that affirmed that when married couples jointly farmed regulated commodities, the wives were eligible to vote in allotment referenda. (See USDA – PMA, Tobacco, “Questions and Answers on Flue-Cured Tobacco Referendum,” p. 2, June, 1952, Box 6, Folder “Circular Letters, July-December 1952,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.) This led to confusion about the wives of farmers who were not land owners. The Virginia State ASC committee interpreted the regulations in 1961 thusly: A woman who owned farmland with allotments in her own name could vote, as could a woman married to a landowner with allotments. The wives of tenants and share croppers were not eligible to vote unless their own names specifically appeared on tenancy/share agreements, in other words, unless the woman was herself the tenant. Marriage to the tenant alone was insufficient. The same was true for some wives in multi-generational farm enterprises. If a father and son(s) together farmed land owned solely by the father, the father’s wife could vote in her capacity as part owner by marriage; the sons could vote in their capacity as managers; the sons’ wives could not vote. If a son did own a portion of the land, then his wife could vote. (Virginia ASC State Committee to Deputy Administration, State County Operations, November 17, 1961, Box 2, RG 145, NARA.)

⁴⁸ Robert Earl Martin, “Negro-White Participation in the A.A.A. Cotton and Tobacco Referenda in North And South Carolina: A Study in Differential Voting and Attitudes in Selected Areas,” Ph.D. diss, University of Chicago, 1947.

farmers supported and participated in AAA programs at high rates. The degree of referenda participation for both groups depended more on their tenure status than on their race. In fact, among land owning farmers in Wilson County a higher percentage of black farmers voted in AAA referenda than white, with 100 percent of black land owners having voted at least once in an AAA referendum, and 92.5 percent of white land owners. Black tenant farmers far outstripped white tenants, voting at a rate of 90 percent versus 79 percent. Black voting participation fell off sharply as they descended down the tenure ladder. Only 64 percent of black share croppers voted, compared to nearly 94 percent of white share croppers.⁴⁹ Darlington County landowners' voting records differed from Wilson County's, but tenant and share cropper voting rates showed similar trends.⁵⁰

Table 1: Composite data on voting rates found by Robert Martin, 1947. Voting rates basted on survey responses, counted as a voter any individual who reported voting at least once in any AAA election since 1938⁵¹

	% White Landowners	% Black Landowners	% White tenants	% Black Tenants	% White Croppers	% Black croppers
NC	92.5	100	79.3	90	93.7	64.4
SC	75	68.6	68.8	85.2	75	68.6

Martin's research investigated the reasons why people voted, on what basis they decided to vote for or against marketing regulations, and the quality of their experiences

⁴⁹ Martin, "Negro-White Participation," 181.

⁵⁰ Martin, "Negro-White Participation," 182.

⁵¹ Martin, "Negro-White Participation," 181-182.

at polling places. What he found illuminates the differences between the reasons that black farmers exercised their right to vote in AAA referenda and the reasons that white farmers allowed this participation with a minimum of interference. Black farmers reported, nearly unanimously, that they voted in favor of AAA allotment programs because they resulted in higher prices for the crops they grew.⁵² Most black farmers who voted reported trouble-free polling. They told Martin that white farmers “treated us fine” and “they acted like I was as welcome as anybody else.”⁵³

This optimism was tempered, though, by many black respondents’ suspicion that the reason white land owners welcomed them at the polls was because black farmers’ votes were necessary to demonstrate popular support for the AAA. Many sharecroppers reported experiencing pressure from their landlords to vote for the programs.⁵⁴ “They were very anxious for us to vote – they wanted to carry the program,” one told Martin.⁵⁵ A number of Martin’s white informants in Darlington County agreed, asserting that they tolerated black referenda participation because they “wanted ‘em all to vote –it’d help carry the program;’ and ‘they didn’t care [that black farmers voted] ‘cause they knew [blacks] was gonna vote like they wanted ‘em to.’”⁵⁶ Some tensions between white and black farmers were evident in the survey responses. Some self-

⁵² Martin, “Negro-White Participation,” 276, 210, 212.

⁵³ Martin, “Negro-White Participation,” 246.

⁵⁴ Martin, “Negro-White Participation,” 182; Raper, *Preface to Peasantry*, 249-251.

⁵⁵ Martin, “Negro-White Participation,” 246.

⁵⁶ Martin, “Negro-White Participation,” 247.

identified small farmers in South Carolina opposed black farmers' referenda participation because they believed black farmers "voted with the big farmers."⁵⁷ In his observations of the AAA in Georgia, Arthur Raper encountered similar attitudes.⁵⁸

Anxiety over voter turnout reflected some uncertainty about support for farm programs by both the general public and by farmers. The law required a two-thirds majority of actual voters only, not of all allotment holders. Low turnout had the potential to undermine support from Congress and the American people. Weaver cautioned his Extension Agents that "unless a strong vote is cast, the whole agricultural situation may be endangered. Certainly, the non-agricultural public must be shown that farmers themselves are interested and believe in agricultural programs."⁵⁹ "No" votes, which did occasionally happen, reflected farmers' evaluation of the state of the market and demonstrated that the referendum process was working. Therefore, officials saw disengagement with the program, as indicated by failure to turn out for the vote, to be more dangerous than even the defeat of a given year's marketing quota at the polls.

The referendum process was structured so that it excluded the possibility of serious and thorough-going critique or revision of the program by voting. When any vote – yes or no – implied support for the program, voting offered no avenue for critique

⁵⁷ Martin, "Negro-White Participation," 251.

⁵⁸ Raper, *Preface to Peasantry*, 249-251.

⁵⁹ David Weaver to Agents in Flue-Cured Tobacco Counties, July 3, 1952, Box 6, Folder "Circular Letters, July-December 1952," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

or revision. Withholding the vote was the only method of protest. Some farmers understood this dynamic, and appealed to agency leaders' concerns when they expressed their dissatisfaction with various farm programs. Susan Farmer, a tobacco grower from Beulaville, North Carolina, wrote to the ASCS offices in Washington to protest the continued reduction in tobacco allotments that was disproportionately affecting small farmers. "There is a lot of farmers talking of voting on the farm program no more if [the current proposal is] approved."⁶⁰

Such talk did not even begin to address the problems the referendum process posed for those who aspired to be farmers, but for any number of reasons were not even eligible to vote. In 1960, Mrs. Wesley Walden, from Ashland City, Tennessee, sent one such letter to her senator, Estes Kefauver. A USDA official had upheld the ASC county committee's denial of her application for a new tobacco allotment. He justified the ASC's actions on the grounds that "in a referendum held February 24, 1959, . . . Burley tobacco growers . . . favored marketing quotas on the 1959, 1960, and 1961 crops." Some commodity-specific version of this language was the standard reply to nearly all complainants, whether from agriculture or industry. Walden conveyed her incredulity at this response in her letter to Kefauver. "How could this apply to us or any other farmer who does not grow tobacco since we have no vote in the referendum? Sounds as if the

⁶⁰ Susan Farmer to Harry Evans, Jr., November 13, 1963, Box 13, RG 145, NARA.

farmers have their own brand of segregation.”⁶¹ Walden, and many other would-be commodity growers thus shut out of their chosen occupation by regulations they had not opportunity to approve or reject, recognized that the referendum system facilitated the gate-keeping functions of the marketing regulations. The laid the responsibility for her exclusion on both the USDA and the farmers who cooperated with the system.

Walden’s allusion to segregation in the USDA’s economic democracy unwittingly pointed to dynamics that made the kind of protest that she and Susan Farmer proposed difficult to accomplish. Within the bounds of the included farm population, AAA referenda expanded the franchise to people who otherwise faced resistance to their participation. Black farmers in Wilson and Darlington Counties found it difficult to set such an opportunity aside, though they found the reasons for their relatively easy access to the polls galling. One black informant told Martin, “some of the colored I talked to said they [weren’t] going to vote ‘cause they hadn’t been letting us vote before in the political election; and now they want us to vote ‘cause they need us – and I ain’t gonna do it.” One black farm owner explained his own difficult decision to vote. “Some said they hadn’t let them vote before and so they were not going to vote now. But the colored county agent told all of us we ought to go and take advantage of

⁶¹ Mrs. Wesley F. Walden to Estes Kefauver, April 11, 1960, Box 9, Folder “Tobacco 15-1, April, 1960,” RG 145, NARA.

the opportunity – and I felt we should, too.’’⁶² As a land owner, this informant determined that he had some economic benefit to gain from the AAA. Black tenants and share croppers came to different conclusions.

As Robert Martin noted, the rates at which black farmers voted decreased sharply as they descended the land tenure ladder. One of the greatest effects of the allotment system was to increase farm size and decrease the number of total tenancies and share cropper opportunities in rural communities. Because Martin measured black voter participation based on whether an individual had ever voted in a single referenda, his numbers did not reflect whether and to what extent individual voters ceased voting as their status receded. Black farmers were often pushed down the ladder, to poorer quality tenancies, or into share cropping and wage hand work before they left agriculture entirely.⁶³ If their voting behavior reflected their tenure status at the time of the referenda, then the level of black voter participation over time was likely considerably less than that of white voters over time, whose status receded more slowly and who experienced less of an associated drop off in voting rates than black farmers.⁶⁴

Policy referenda were popular tools for the expansion of democracy and for making government more responsive to the will of the people. During the Progressive

⁶² Martin, “Negro-White Participation,” 254. The informant did not feel that the black Extension agent was acting more in the interest of the AAA than of black farmers in his district, adding that “he did some mighty fine work here. He enlightened us to a lot of things the white people were keeping hid from us.”

⁶³ Martin, “Negro-White Participation,” 279; R.J. Miliken, “Recent Changes in Negro Farm Tenure in North Carolina,” Master’s Thesis, NCSU, 1943.

⁶⁴ Martin, “Negro-White Participation,” 181-182.

Era, some states governments adopted referenda mechanisms as part of their good government initiatives that combated corruption and the influence of special interests. As adopted by the USDA, however, policy referenda could not shape or repeal the basic structures of commodity production and marketing regulations. They could only approve or reject their application to specific commodities for limited periods of time. The possibilities for real policy in this aspect of the Farm State's economic democracy were more illusory than real. Paradoxically, farmers who could vote in these referenda, even when they realized the effect of such voting was minimal, had a vested interest in the status quo. Those who met voter eligibility requirements benefited from the production regulation and subsidization programs, including the way in which they acted as gate-keepers, preventing new producers from entering the fray. These farmers had little incentive to challenge the manner in which the referenda system functioned.

Further complicating the practice of economic democracy in the Farm State was a second institution that depended on farmer participation, was the "farmer elected committee system." The first farmer committees established each farm's production history for the five years prior to 1933 and assigned allotments as percentages of the five-year average. This established production history, or "base acreage" (referred to by farmers and policy makers alike simply as "base"), served as the foundation for an individual farm's yearly allotments of regulated crops, which the committees also assigned. The committees ensured that farmers complied with their contracts, and for

the first committees in 1933, this work began with the plow-up of excess acreage planted before the AAA became law.⁶⁵ Committees distributed plow-up payments and loan dispersal funds to growers.

Farmer committees were not part of the original 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act, but rather the USDA's solution to the administrative task of assigning production allotments to millions of individual farmers across the country. The United States had 413.2 million acres of land, divided among 6.3 million separate farms, under cultivation in 1930. Nearly two million of these farms, located almost entirely in the South, grew 43 million acres of cotton; 386 thousand farms in the South raised 1.7 million acres of tobacco; and the region was home to 56 million live hogs. The United States had 62 million acres of wheat, 83 million acres of corn, and 740 thousand acres of rice in production that same year.⁶⁶ Each of these six commodities had their own, separately-administered AAA programs with their own regulations. These regulations had to be applied individually to every single grower who signed commodity reduction contracts,

⁶⁵ See Arthur Raper for evocative description of the "plow-up." Arthur Raper, *Preface to Peasantry*, 243-245.

⁶⁶ *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930: Agriculture, Vol. II—The Southern States: Reports by States with Statistics for Counties and a Summary for the United States, Tables for the United States and for the North, the South, and the West*, pp. 10, 14, 16.
http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/Historical_Publications/1930/Reports_by_State_Southern/03337983v2p2ch02.pdf.

For the purposes of the census, the following states are "Southern": Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia. Acres under cultivation refer only to crop land and include no allowance for pasture, which accounted for an additional 464 million acres.

and every county in which these commodities grew required their own administrative apparatus.

The first farmer committees were appointed by the Extension agents who made these appointments from among the local leading farmers. These were the committees that A.A. McKeown and his colleagues hand-picked in anticipation of the AAA's passage. They choose white farmers, usually land owners, who were already involved with Extension research and educational projects, or were alumni of the agency's programs for children and youth. In addition to the farmer members of the committee, the county Extension agent served as *ex officio* member of the county committee. In June of 1933, McKeown met with the local committeemen in the counties that made up his South Carolina district, where he reviewed the cotton contract "in detail," "item by item" with the new committeemen.⁶⁷ Training those farmers who helped implement the program was, in McKeown's opinion, the most important part of his job. "I shall not attempt to explain the work in many counties in connection with training committeemen prior to sending them out in the field for the purpose of signing up farmers in the cotton reduction campaign, but [I] wish to say that the training of committeemen, in my mind, was about the most important work in connection with the sign-up campaign."⁶⁸

Committees took on a task that would have completely overwhelmed the county Extension offices while avoiding sending "hoards of bureaucrats" into farm

⁶⁷ McKeown, "Monthly Report," June, 1933, p. 2.

⁶⁸ McKeown, "Monthly Report," July, 1933, p. 2.

communities to begin from scratch, with little knowledge of local farming practices.⁶⁹ The first task was to establish each farmer's production history, and, according to McKeown, "in order to do this, it was necessary to confer with both county agent and the community and county committeemen and especially community committeemen." In the process, committeemen and Extension officials interpreted ambiguous instructions and devised procedures on the fly when instructions were missing. "The work of the county agents and the committeemen has been very hard but they have stuck to it day and night and in most cases have worked all day Sundays, and in my opinion the campaign has been an outstanding success to date."⁷⁰ This "outstanding success" often depended on the committeemen's social capital, and sometimes, personal economic sacrifice. In Alamance County, North Carolina, committeeman and tobacco farmer Dallas Anderson went door-to-door with his county agent to persuade his neighbors to sign up for the program, and even voluntarily reduced his own tobacco acreage below what was required of him in order to help the county reach its goal and to set an example in his community.⁷¹

The committee system had three tiers. First was the community or township committee, consisting of two to three farmers elected directly by others in the same

⁶⁹ Recover cite. One of the congressional reports.

⁷⁰ McKeown, "Monthly Report," July, 1933, p. 2.

⁷¹ W. Kerr Scott to E.Y. Floyd, March 20, 1941, Box. 3, Folder "Floyd, E.Y.," Department of Agriculture, Commissioners Office, General Correspondence, NCSA. E. Y. Floyd to Dallas Anderson, April 2, 1941, , Box 3 "Fe-Graham," Folder "Floyd, E.Y.," Department of Agriculture, Commissioner's Office, General Correspondence, 1936-1947, NCSA.

community. Second was the county committee of three to five men who were chosen by the community committeemen from among themselves. Originally each county had separate committees for each commodity (e.g. corn committees, tobacco committees, etc.), but after the first two years, a single farmer-elected committee administered all AAA programs in the county. State committee oversaw the work of all county committees. Three to five non-elected political appointees, chosen by the Secretary of Agriculture on the advice of Senators from his party served on these committees, and they had the authority to audit, review, and overturn county committee decisions.

The farmer committee system suffered from some significant shortcomings, including a lack of diversity among both the committee members themselves and the people who voted for them. Committee members were, with only a small few individual exceptions, men. They were usually land owners, well established but not elderly, and generally the best educated of their peers. Martin determined that “these implicitly understood qualifications—ownership and education—have helped to bring it to pass that the AAA committee posts have revolved very slowly among the small circle of the top tenure group.”⁷² In Edgecombe County, North Carolina, where roughly forty men served as community committeemen every year, the same five men dominated the county committee for the entire decade. Robert Martin’s research in Wilson and Darlington counties shows similar trends in the 1940s, and the Department of

⁷² Martin, “Negro-White Participation,” p. 260.

Agriculture would cite this as a common trend in the 1950s.⁷³ Even at the height of interest in the AAA's proceedings, turn out for these elections were generally lower than the turn out for allotment referenda.⁷⁴ Many observers attributed this low turnout to the uncontested nature of most elections.

Table 2: Committee members, Edgecombe County Committee, 1952-1959⁷⁵

	J.C. Powell (County Agent)	H. Mayo Cherry	R.B. Eason	R.R. Brake	P.A. Weeks	H. P. Jenkins
1952	X	X*	X	X		
1953	X	X*	X	X		
1954	X	X*	X	X		
1955	X	X*	X		X	
1956	X	X*	X		X	
1957	X	X*	X		X	
1958	X	X*	X		X	
1959	X	X*			X	X

*** committee chair**

⁷³ Martin, "Negro-White Participation," p. 260; Martin, "Referendum Process in Agricultural Adjustment Programs," *Agricultural History* 25:1 (Jan 1951): 39. Testimony of Earl M. Hughes, Administrator of the Agricultural Conservation and Stabilization Service, "Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees," p. 8-10. See also chapter 3.

⁷⁴ There does not seem to be systematically collected or maintained data on these elections.

⁷⁵ Annual Reports of the Edgecombe County, North Carolina, PMA and ASC offices. Originals in possession of Edgecombe County Cooperative Agricultural Extension Service, Tarboro, N.C. Copies in author's possession.

While women and black farmers were welcome at the polling place for allotment referenda, they were excluded by measures *de facto* and *de jure* from serving as committee members or in leadership positions within agency offices between 1933 and 1964. Prior to 1964, not one county or state committee position anywhere in the South had been filled by a black farmer, and “only a handful” had served at the community committee level.⁷⁶ In Mississippi, only four black men served as community committeemen in 1963, likely all in a single community in Bolivar County, Mississippi, which a USDA press release claimed had continuously elected black committeemen since 1934. However, none of these community committeemen had ever served on the county committee.⁷⁷ A concerted effort by voting rights activists in Mississippi resulted in the first state-wide cohort of fourteen black community committeemen taking office in 1965. Civil rights activists and black committee candidates met with furious resistance during the 1964 election. A CORE activist who observed the elections in Madison County, Mississippi in December 1964 “was knocked to the ground and whipped with a belt buckle.” Four other civil rights workers across the state were arrested on committee election day.⁷⁸ USDA officials maintained they could offer neither candidates nor poll

⁷⁶ William Seabron to Robert Smith, December 17, 1965, Box 4266, Folder, "Committees 1, Community-County-State, December 17 to [1965]," RG 16, NARA.

⁷⁷ "For A.M. Release Sunday," December 20, USDA, 12-18-1964, Box 4267, Folder "Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan 1 to March 8 [1965]," RG 16, NARA; William Seabron to Robert Smith, 12-17-1965, Box 4266, Folder, "Committees 1, Community-County-State, December 17 to [1965], RG 16, NARA.

⁷⁸ "Rights Aide Beaten at Mississippi Poll During Farm Vote," *New York Times* (December 4, 1964); Charles C. Diggs to Orville Freeman, December 15, 1964, Box 4267, Folder "Committees 1, Community-

observers any protection against such violence, and instead announced their intention to hold future elections by mail-in ballots to avoid future altercations.⁷⁹

The first black farmers received appointments to southern ASC state committees around the same time. In March, 1965, ASC chief administrator Horace Godfrey, who rose through the ranks of the PMA and ASC in North Carolina, submitted his proposal to Secretary Freeman that a black member should be immediately appointed to the state committees in both Mississippi and Arkansas. Furthermore, “when a vacancy occurs in any other state where the Negro farm population exceeds 10 percent of the total farm population, a Negro [should] be appointed to fill the vacancy.”⁸⁰ This policy met with immediate resistance. In Alabama, one senator facing re-election in 1966 feared that “such an appointment would be ‘hung around his neck’ and could lead to his defeat.”⁸¹ Heated negotiations came to a “stalemate” with South Carolina Senator Richard Russell. He was a late-term replacement for the deceased Olin Johnston, and he was fighting

County-State, Jan 1 to March 8 [1965]”, RG 16, , NARA; Joseph M. Robertson to Charles C Diggs, January 14, 1965, Box 4267, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan 1 to March 8 [1965]”, RG 16, NARA.

⁷⁹ Joseph M. Robertson to Charles C Diggs, January 14, 1965, Box 4267, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan 1 to March 8 [1965]”, RG 16, NARA.

⁸⁰ H.D. Godfrey to Orville Freeman and the Under Secretary, March 9, 1965, Box 4267, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, March 9 – October 19 [1965]”, RG 16, NARA.

⁸¹ Ken Birkhead to Orville Freeman, February 5, 1965, Box 4267, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan 1 to March 8 [1965]”, RG 16, NARA; E.F.M. to Bill Moyers, February 1, 1965, Box 4267, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan 1 to March 8 [1965]”, RG 16, NARA.

hard to hold the seat in the 1966 election.⁸² The dispute was resolved only by an agreement to delay any new appointments to the committee until after the election. The USDA observed their policy to make appointments of black farmers to the committees, but they appeased senatorial objections by increasing three member state committees to five members. This gave whites four-to-one majorities on the committees and effectively isolated new black members and negated their votes.⁸³

Women's positions in the formal structures of the ASC shifted between 1933 and 1960, especially during the 1950s. Like black farmers, women held very few committee seats across the county, although there were isolated cases. However, white women were important sources of clerical labor in the local AAA, PMA, and ASC offices. Young women from local communities filled these jobs as a way of further connecting the community to the administrative process. Hiring local women was also an exercise of patronage (and sometimes nepotism) by the county committee. The USDA's higher level officials supported this practice. M.L. Wilson, a chief architect of the allotment system and the national director of the Extension Service in the 1950s explained that

⁸² Johnston and served from April 22, 1965 to November 8, 1966. He was unsuccessful in securing the nomination in 1966. "Russell, Donald Stuart," Biographical Guide of the United States Congress, <<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=R000525>> (April 10, 2013).

⁸³ H.D. Godfrey to Orville Freeman and the Under Secretary, March 9, 1965, Box 4267, Folder "Committees 1, Community-County-State, March 9 to October 19 [1965]," RG16, NARA; Horace Godfrey to Thomas Hughes, Jan 21, 1966, Box 4464, Folder "Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan - April 1, 1966," RG 16, NARA; Horace Godfrey to Tom Hughes, April 25, 1966, Box 4464, Folder "Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan - April 1, 1966," RG 16, NARA; H.D. Godfrey to Henry Hall Wilson, April 25, 1966, Box 4464, Folder "Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan - April 1, 1966," RG 16, NARA.

from his years of observation he had concluded that a “local girl” was often the “best office person in a county extension office.”

Such a person might be a daughter of a farmer who lived in that county, have a family who is well known, and well known as a farmer’s daughter as a person that had this intimate, friendly, sympathetic connection and attitude to neighbors. . . . A city girl . . . might have a very much higher rate of efficiency in stenography and in office filing and those kinds of things . . . [but] they lacked this farmer neighborhood experiences, so that I feel that many of these problems in democracy, if you leave them to the people that are governing, so to speak, they get better solutions than otherwise.⁸⁴

Wilson understood the inclusion of local women in USDA county office staff as fundamentally democratic. The practice strengthened the connections between the community and the institution, but harkened back to older approaches to government, before the institution of a civil service.

Women of respected farming families were to take on this work and put a familiar face on the institution. They were not supposed to exercise authority or shape the ways those institutions functioned. But for a space of time in the late 1940s and early 1950s, women in some county PMA and ASC offices did exactly that. In 1948, Thelma Doiron took a clerical job in Louisiana’s East Baton Rouge Parish, where she earned the respect of the county committee and local farmers. In 1960, those farmers pushed to have Doiron named county office manager after the former manager, also a woman, died. One letter of recommendation stated that “during the illness of . . . the former

⁸⁴ “Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, United States Senate” 84th Congress on S. 544, June 13, 14, November 14, 15, 1955; June 11 and 12, 1956, p.38.

office manager, Mrs. Doiron served the farmer of this Parish very satisfactorily as Acting County Office Manager and ran a very efficient office, giving fully of her time beyond the call of duty under the existing circumstances.”⁸⁵ Doiron did not get the job. She was disqualified because she lacked a bachelor’s degree in agriculture at a time when few women earned such degrees.⁸⁶ Her predecessor had been hired during a time when the county manager job was defined locally by individual county committees. But as of 1959, State ASC committees had been “authorized to raise the standards” for new managerial hires in their offices. “They have been specifically authorized to specify male applicants only for all counties in the State, or for certain types or groups of counties.”⁸⁷ While barred from most managerial positions assisting the county committee’s work, local white women filled many lower level clerical offices and did much of the daily administrative work necessary to implement farm production regulations and commodity subsidies. Even so, women’s foothold on the positions of authority within the PMA and ASC offices proved tenuous, and like many women in government who rose to positions of authority in during the New Deal only to lose ground in the late 1940s.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ John L. East to Senator Allen Ellender, September 26, 1960, Box 3418, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, October 1 to [1960],” RG16, NARA.

⁸⁶ Marvin L. McLain to Russell B. Long, November 10, 1960, Box 3418, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, October 1 to [1960],” RG16, NARA.

⁸⁷ Marvin L. McLain to J. Floyd Breeding, September 11, 1959, Box 3267, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, August 7 to October 15 [1959],” RG 16, NARA.

⁸⁸ See Landon R.Y. Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

There are no statistics documenting the rate at which women voted for the county committee representatives, but in the 1960s women's participation in these elections drew some scrutiny that was resisted by the Agricultural Stabilization office. As black farmers, male and female alike, asserted their rights to vote, the barriers to women's participation came more clearly into focus. Most farmers received their ballots in the mail prior to elections, but many black tenant farmers had been excluded from the list. ASC offices relied on landlords to report the names of individuals with an interest in crops grown on his farm. Tenants and share croppers not on the list had to prove their eligibility by obtaining an oral or written statement from their landlord or producing written evidence, such as warehouse receipts or lease agreements. Cotton gin receipts were not acceptable evidence.⁸⁹ Such standards could be impossible to meet in the face of land owner resistance.

Black women faced tougher standards than anyone else in obtaining ballots. The USDA fielded allegations that Mississippi county committees required black women who wished to vote in committee elections to bring proof to county offices that their names appeared on land deeds or tenancy agreements before receiving ballots, while white women received ballots based on their word alone. The USDA responded that all interested voters received ballots upon request, but conceded that such ballots could be invalidated before they were counted if the voter's eligibility was not firmly

⁸⁹ William M. Seabron to Robert Smith, December 17, 1965, Box 4266, Folder "Committees 1, Community-County-State, December 17 to [1965]," RG 16, NARA.

established.⁹⁰ In the end, the Secretary's office repeated the rules governing ballot distribution, but gave very little consideration to concerns that those rules were being implemented unfairly for black farmers or for women.

This same dismissive attitude toward women's participation in the process was in evidence again three years later. In 1968, the ASC strongly rebuffed a suggestion from an internal USDA committee on program review and evaluation to study the participation of farmers' wives in ASC committee elections. Horace Godfrey replied that the ASC had no funds or personnel to undertake such a study and that "we question seriously whether or survey of the nature proposed is needed or would be useful. In instances where spouses are eligible to participate in ASC community elections, they have every right to do so and are encouraged to do so. Whether or not they do participate rests solely on the decisions of those individuals."⁹¹ Godfrey had taken the lead in developing the USDA's policy for racially integrating the ASC committees, but he scoffed at the suggestion that the limits to women's participation merited study. "In our judgment, present personnel can perform more important duties which are of benefit of farmers," rather than diverting resources to such a study.⁹² In-depth

⁹⁰ William M. Seabron to Robert Smith, December 17, 1965, Box 4266, Folder "Committees 1, Community-County-State, December 17 to [1965]," RG 16, NARA.

⁹¹ H.D. Godfrey to Alfred L. Edwards, October 15, 1968, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, General Correspondence of the Office of the Secretary, 1906-1970, "Committees 1, Community-County-State, September 1 to December 11, 1968," RG 17, NARA.

⁹² H.D. Godfrey to Alfred L. Edwards, October 15, 1968, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, General Correspondence of the Office of the Secretary, 1906-1970, "Committees 1, Community-County-State, September 1 to December 11, 1968," RG 17, NARA.

investigation under the auspices USDA of women's interactions with the ASC would not occur until the 1980s.⁹³

Conclusion

The declining inclusivity of AAA referenda and committee elections had implications for rural Southern society. Some observers in the 1930s and 1940s hoped that the exercise of economic democracy would lead to an expansion of Southern political democracy. Gunnar Myrdal expressed such a hope in his 1944 study of segregation, *An American Dilemma*. "Although the unrestricted voting by Negroes in the A.A.A. referenda does not give them any political power, it, nevertheless, may be of great significance. It accustoms whites to the presence of Negroes at polling places and perhaps makes them think beyond the myth of black domination and consider the real issues involved in Negro voting. It provides the South with an example of elections based on significant issues and with less corruption than usual. It also gives the Negro a chance to vote and perhaps to discover the nature of the political process."⁹⁴

This was the optimistic hypothesis with which Robert Martin, himself African American, undertook his 1940s study of the AAA in North and South Carolina. Like David Weaver, Martin saw evidence that voting in one context could lead to voting in

⁹³ C. Jones, R.A. Rosenfeld, L. Olsen, *American Farm Women: Findings from a National Study*, (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, 1981); Rachel Ann Rosenfeld, *Farm Women: Work Farm and Family in the United States*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.)

⁹⁴ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1944), p. 489.

another context. The black farmers he interviewed expressed the importance of the experience of voting in AAA elections. Most expressed that the referenda provided useful experience in the mechanics of voting. “You see votin’ was something new to me. Never had voted before. Now I kind of know what it’s all about. At first when I went up there, I didn’t know what I was supposed to do.” Another explained that, “I know we learned – because I’ve been through it. I know it for myself now. It wouldn’t be strange to go up and vote now.”⁹⁵ The overwhelming of majority of black respondents to Martin’s surveys agreed, but white land owners and tenants were less willing to concede the point.⁹⁶

The hopes of Martin, Myrdal, and many black farmers did not find fulfillment in the economic democracy of the USDA. As the population of black farmers on all rungs of the land tenure ladder decreased, their votes became less important to creating the good showing at the polling place that officials so desperately craved. Thus the participation of black farmers lost value to white farmers, and their insistence on participating in farm policy elections in the context of the civil rights movement met with violence. Women were excluded from all but low level clerical work in the ASC, and unconnected women could not even access this work. Suggestions that there was value in better understanding the voting behaviors of farm women met with incredulity and scorn at the highest levels of the USDA.

⁹⁵ Martin, “Negro-White Participation,” p. 295.

⁹⁶ Martin, “Negro-White Participation,” p. 297-298.

Nevertheless, over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, proponents of farm support, congressional Democrats in particular, would cling to the notion that the AAA had been at the outset an example of nearly pure, grassroots, populist democracy in action. M.L. Wilson looked back from the vantage point of the mid-1950s, and pronounced it “the greatest demonstration of democracy in action in the history of this nation. Thousands of farmers and ranchers became part-time administrators of the largest civilian government effort in the history of the world.”⁹⁷

Economic democracy was a state-centered philosophy. The federal government created institutions to implement economic policies with the specific consent of directly affected groups. Farmers participated in referenda in order to approve or reject regulatory and subsidization policies, and then administered those policies themselves by electing representatives from among their peers to do the work. These institutions reflected the principles of self-government while relying on the reach and authority of the federal government. Herbert Hoover had called his pet project, the Federal Farm Board, his “grand instrumentality,” but in the end, the organization of farm production was most effectively accomplished by many small instrumentalities, the AAA, as well as other federal farm programs that were similarly administered.

In spite of this decentralization of program administration and the mobilization of farmers as administrators, economic democracy as practiced by the AAA

⁹⁷ Huffman, “Montana’s Contributions,” 166.

provided little meaningful opportunity for truly popular policy development. With the practice of economic democracy so limited, the population that benefited from the associated policies was similarly limited. This “democracy” provided no forum for debate and no means for protest and dissent within the system. As a result, the farmers who bore the brunt of the ill effects of production regulations – share tenant, share croppers, part-time farmers, and the poor, as we shall see in future chapters – were those least able to make their voices heard.

Chapter 2: The Politics of Post-War Farm Support

R.W. Slate, president of Colonial Furniture House, Inc. in Greensboro, North Carolina, was outraged by a story he read in the February 13, 1950, issue of *Newsweek*. Slate fired off a letter to Secretary of Agriculture Charles Brannan and Congressman Clyde Hoey in which he reiterated the article's assertion that the Department of Agriculture was considering a program "to transplant a million farm families into industry, training them for their jobs, and providing subsistence allowances until they are set."¹ Slate found the prospect of such special assistance for farmers to be unfair to other business owners. "Recently a survey was made in Greensboro, and it was determined that there are too many furniture stores in this area for the population. . . . We are just wondering if the Government would be interested in moving us at Government expense into an area in which we would be more likely to succeed. . . . We think it is unfair to go to the this trouble to befriend the farmers, as outlined in this article, and not befriend the rest of the people who are also having a hard time making a living."²

The staff of the Secretary's office found this letter completely ridiculous, and passed it around among themselves, looking for the right person to respond to the

¹ R. W. Slate to Charles Brannan, February 10, 1950, Box 1883, Folder "General Correspondence, 1906-1976, 1950, Organization 1 (PMA), RG 16, NARA; *Greensboro (Guilford County, N.C.) City Directory, 1952*, (Richmond, Hill Directory, Co. 1952), Internet Archive and UNC Greensboro University Libraries, http://you.archive.org/stream/greensboroguil195152unse/greensboroguil195152unse_djvu.txt (March 17, 2013)

² R. W. Slate to Charles Brannan, February 10, 1950, Box 1883, Folder "General Correspondence, 1906-1976, 1950, Organization 1 (PMA), RG 16, NARA.

letter's allegations. In the notes attached to the file, one staffer asked another: "got a snappy retort?"³ Absurd as Brannan's office found Slate's concerns at first glance, their attitude sobered when they read the *Newsweek* item for themselves. The entry appeared under what we shall see was an inflammatory heading, announcing the "Newest Brannan Plan." It claimed that a farmer relocation program was part of a ten-year plan, for which the USDA had requested nearly \$450 million, to relocate "one-sixth of the present farmers." *Newsweek* claimed that this relocation plan, intended to direct such struggling farmers into industrial work, was essential to the USDA's strategy for reducing surplus crop production.⁴

Instead of a "snappy retort," Slate received a three page letter from Secretary Brannan himself, plus additional supporting documents, that refuted the *Newsweek* piece's assertions in detail. Brannan claimed that its only "factual statement" was the assertion that "technology has sharply reduced farm-manpower requirements." He explained that it was true that mechanization threatened the livelihoods of "low-income" farmers, particularly tenants, share croppers, and those with very small farms.⁵ These people were, in fact, leaving the farm for other endeavors without the aid of any dedicated relocation program. In the face of this reality, Brannan reasoned that some

³ Wesley McCune, Lyle Webster, and Phil Aylesworth, undated notes, Box 1883, Folder "General Correspondence, 1906-1976, 1950, Organization 1 (PMA)," RG 16, NARA.

⁴ "Newest Brannan Plan," *Newsweek* 35:7, (February 13, 1950): 11.

⁵ Charles Brannan to R. W. Slate, March 2, 1950, p. 2, Box 1883, Folder "General Correspondence, 1906-1976, 1950, Organization 1 (PMA), RG 16, NARA.

USDA response was appropriate. "I would suggest that education, guidance, and credit assistance be available in order to help provide maximum opportunity for people to be profitably employed and to make their maximum contribution to an expanding economy."⁶

Slate and Brannan's exchange, and the *Newsweek* article to which they responded, exemplified the struggle to define the goals and mechanisms of federal farm policy in the immediate post-war years. How should they be framed and pursued: as integral to a comprehensive national economic policy, working in tandem with labor and consumer policies to sustain a prosperous economy, or as interest group legislation, separate and oppositional to policies specific to other economic sectors? Why should farmers continue to receive special assistance from the government in the much-improved economy and what kind of farmers should benefit from those programs? Secretary Brannan and many other progressives proposed revising farm programs to funnel the bulk of price support and cash payment benefits to smaller land owners and ambitious tenant farmers. They hoped to avoid and reverse policy incentives for the concentration of farmland assets into many fewer, much larger farms. Stakeholders in the existing programs, including southern Democrats, the American Farm Bureau, and owners of rapidly expanding commercial farms, opposed any caps on benefits and obstructed programs intended to provide targeted help to low income and landless farmers. They

⁶ Charles Brannan to R. W. Slate, March 2, 1950, p. 3, Box 1883, Folder "General Correspondence, 1906-1976, 1950, Organization 1 (PMA), RG 16, NARA.

argued that all farmers, even apparently successful commercial farmers, needed support and protection in an economy whose abundance was unevenly distributed.

At its heart, this debate was about the character of and continued justification for farm programs that subsidized staple commodity production. The AAA had been created in a time of economic crisis, but that crisis was over. Rural poverty persisted, and even relatively successful farmers felt that American economic prosperity was advancing without them. At best, they were being left behind by rising non-farm wages and, at worst consumers were making gains in their standard of living at farmers' expense. Commercial farmers demanded policy protections that would shield them from consumers' demands for cheap food and help close the gap between farm and non-farm incomes.

This disagreement about how to allocate within the farm community the direct financial benefits of farm programs – subsidies, conservation payments, and credit – was part of a bigger disagreement over the importance of farm supports to the wider economy. Progressives argued that farm policy should be an integral part of coordinated policies for agriculture, industry, and consumers. They advanced a vision for farm policy that put at its center fair compensation and stable prices for rural and urban workers and consumers, with the government shielding farmers and workers from the worst extremes of unregulated capitalism. The more conservative framing separated the interests of farmers from other economic groups. This perspective on

commodity support saw farmers in general as under-appreciated and economically vulnerable. If there were not policy protections for agriculture, these competition economic actors would divert every dime of potential income from agricultural production and marketing away from the farmer himself, leaving him uncompensated for his toil and increasingly impoverished.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, a new, interpretation of parity that emphasized farmers' separateness and unique economic vulnerabilities became the fundamental principle of farm politics. The AAA had relied on a standard of parity that compared farm and consumer prices to those between 1910 and 1914, and aimed to achieve some similar ratio of "purchasing power" for farmers in the midst of the Great Depression. After World War II, Secretary Brannan proposed to dispense with parity as the basis on which support levels were determined. He recommended instead that farm supports guarantee a minimum level of income, or standard of living, for farm families. While Brannan's proposal was very much in keeping with immediate post-war progressive politics, it failed to get any traction in farm policy circles. Instead, re-consideration of farm supports in the period narrowed to a single question: at what "percent of parity" should the USDA support staple commodity prices? The AAA's supporters among small farmers and landowners hoped to commit the USDA to high parity-based price supports. Many Republicans and more conservative Democrats advocated more discretion for the Secretary of Agriculture to provide parity supports within a lower,

more flexible range. The disagreements between adherents to each approach disagreed, sometimes bitterly, but their shared commitment to parity at whatever level precluded a broader discussion of other approaches to the problems of the farm economy.

Evolution of Parity

The advent of World War II turned the goals of New Deal farm policies upside down. New Deal era farm program, created with the goal of reducing surplus, was repurposed during World War II to maximize production while imposing ceilings (rather than floors) on commodity prices.⁷ The military's demand for cotton, tobacco, and food, along with exports to American allies drew down the surplus in storage and commanded all of the agricultural commodities the country could produce. The machinery of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration was channeled into the War Food Administration. The county committees encouraged individuals to maximize commodity production as well as food production for home and local use. In the Carolinas, this meant an intensified focus on the cotton and tobacco, as well as some crop diversification.

The 1944 annual report of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service showcased the state's contributions to the war effort. It addressed an audience of service members, young farmers and former farm agency personnel now in uniform, and explained North Carolina's contribution to the fight. "Regardless of the branch of the

⁷ Benson, *Cross Fire*, 56.

armed forces in which you are serving, whether at home or abroad, it is likely that, daily, you have been using some of the many products which originated through the efforts of farm families in North Carolina.”⁸ Cotton for “gauze, bandages, clothing, and ammunition;” oil from soybeans and peanuts; and cigarettes from “tobacco developed and grown in North Carolina” combined to make the state’s agricultural production integral to the war effort. “Those of you who went to Manila with General MacArthur carried with you 40,000 quarts of frozen, pasteurized, homogenized milk processed here in North Carolina” for use in hospitals and on ships transporting the wounded.⁹

The Extension annual report combined farm boosterism with wartime morale-lifting propaganda. Readers learned that North Carolina’s farmers had significantly increased their yields on all crops in the years since Pearl Harbor, and that they maintained this burst of production in increasingly difficult circumstances. The draft and the demand for labor in urban war industries siphoned rural workers out of the countryside. The nation’s industrial focus on materiel and other supplies necessary to the war effort created a scarcity of new farm machinery, implements, and replacement parts. The report’s refrain was that farmers were doing more and more with less and less. The post-war tally bore out this conclusion. The USDA reported to Congress in

⁸North Carolina Extension Service, “Annual Report, 1944,” p. 3, Box 17, Folder “Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, 1944” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, 1908-2007, NCSU.

⁹ North Carolina Extension Service, “Annual Report, 1944,” p. 3, Box 17, Folder “Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, 1944” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, 1908-2007, NCSU.

October, 1947, that just “as the dust storms of the thirties dramatized a long-time trend in soil destruction, so has the war dramatized a long-time trend toward greater efficiency . . . Three farm people can now produce more than four could produce just before the war.”¹⁰ The USDA reported that individual farm worker productivity was up by 37 percent from the period just prior to the war.¹¹



Figure 2: Experimental Tobacco Plants¹²

Agronomic research labs in land grant colleges across the South developed commodity hybrids for desirable marketing traits, as well as disease and drought resistance, all of which contributed to significantly increased yields in the 1940s and 1950s.

¹⁰ Charles Brannan to R. W. Slate, March 2, 1950, p. 2, Box 1883, Folder “General Correspondence, 1906-1976, 1950, Organization 1 (PMA), RG 16, NARA.

¹¹ Charles Brannan to R. W. Slate, March 2, 1950, p. 2, Box 1883, Folder “General Correspondence, 1906-1976, 1950, Organization 1 (PMA), RG 16, NARA.

¹² “View of man examining experimental tobacco plants in greenhouse possibly at North Carolina State College, June 1957,” 1957, Item7581, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina., <http://historicalstate.lib.ncsu.edu/catalog/0007581> (accessed April 16, 2013). Photograph used with permission.

Two factors combined to increase North Carolina's war-time production. The generous acreage allotments and marketing quotas allowed farmers to grow and sell more, and they increased yields significantly on each of those acres. "Improved" hybrid varieties led to a 35 percent per acre cotton yield increase in 1944 from 1943 by those growers who participated in the One-Variety Cotton Improvement Programs. Machine shelling and seed treatments that warded off pests and decay produced an average per-acre peanut yield increase of 52 percent on demonstration plots.¹³ Researchers made important breakthroughs in tobacco, the "most important G.I. morale builder," by developing hybrid varieties resistant to Granville wilt. This bacterial disease of bright tobacco, first identified in North Carolina's "middle belt" tobacco growing regions, could destroy entire fields where it struck.¹⁴ New resistant varieties would increase tobacco production significantly.

The production gains that had been integral to the war effort posed a threat to rural economy after the war. These gains were not sufficiently off-set by post-war acreage reductions. In 1948, American corn growers harvested the largest corn crop in American history while although they had significantly reduced total acres planted.

¹³ North Carolina Extension Service, "Annual Report, 1944," p. 10, Box 17, Folder "Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, 1944" North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, 1908-2007, NCSU.

¹⁴ North Carolina Extension Service, "Annual Report, 1944," p. 12, Box 17, Folder "Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, 1944" North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, 1908-2007, NCSU; T. A. Melton and H.D. Shew, "Granville Wilt," Tobacco Disease Information Note 2, Plant Pathology Extension, North Carolina State University, <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/pp/notes/Tobacco/tdin002/tdin002.htm> [March 12, 2013].

Potato growers harvested the second largest potato crop on the fewest acres planted in any of the previous seventy years.¹⁵ War-time Extension publications had promised a bright future to servicemen when they returned to North Carolina, “ready to take over again.”¹⁶ They would find that North Carolina’s agriculture had progressed sufficiently to “enable you to get into that phase of agriculture . . . which will be both pleasant and profitable.”¹⁷ Continued production increases threatened both the profits and the enjoyment in farming. Rural families’ purchasing power was falling just as consumer products were once again widely available. How to respond to war-time production gains and decreasing purchasing power in peace-time was a key question for farm policy makers. Like their predecessors, they turned to parity policies in search of a solution.

Earlier associationalist and New Deal farm policy makers employed the parity paradigm to explain farmers’ struggle to maintain incomes that consistently allowed them to participate in the nation’s growing consumer market. The notion of parity was rooted in the wide-spread perception that industrial workers received

¹⁵ “Statement by Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan,” reprinted from *Congressional Record*, April 7, 1949, p. 4, Box 6, Folder “C, 1948-50,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

¹⁶ North Carolina Extension Service, “Annual Report, 1944,” p. 13, Box 17, Folder “Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, 1944” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, 1908-2007, NCSU.

¹⁷ North Carolina Extension Service, “Annual Report, 1944,” p. 19, Box 17, Folder “Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, 1944” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service Annual Reports, 1908-2007, NCSU.

greater, and therefore supposedly more equitable, compensation for their labor.¹⁸

Industrial workers and investors were also thought to receive direct benefit from tariff protection against foreign imports that farmers did not enjoy. North Carolina

Commissioner of Agriculture Kerr Scott succinctly explained this framing of the purpose of farm programs to a constituent. “The protective tariff in the Nation’s economy has been favorable to labor and capital who possess and manufacture raw materials,” he said. Policies that provided analogous benefit to farmers, Scott continued, were “necessary to give the farmer his rights and protect his standards [of living] just as the protective tariff tends to hold up a high standard of living with our non-farm groups . .

.”¹⁹ The McNary-Haugen Bill and the Agricultural Marketing Act (AMA) included mechanisms to help agriculture capture tariff revenues directly and offset what many believed was the active harm they caused by reducing demand for American farm exports abroad. This was the primary purposes of the export debentures issued under the Hoover-era AMA. It was the AMA, not the subsequent AAA, that first enshrined the principle of parity in law.²⁰

Parity’s attraction stemmed from its ability to describe the relationship between agriculture and other economic sectors. Its proponents compared farm income both to

¹⁸ This model, of course, never takes into account the struggles of industrial workers for fair wages and safe working conditions. The reality of industrial work is unimportant to the concept of parity, only the perception that farmers were underpaid for their work as price takers in commodities markets.

¹⁹ W. Kerr Scott to Everett Nichols, December. 21, 1944, p. 2, Box 2, Folder “Cr-Fa,” Department of Agriculture, Commissioner’s Office, General Correspondence, 1936-1947, NCSA.

²⁰ David E. Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal: American Farm Policy from Hoover to Roosevelt, 1928-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 20-21.

that of industrial workers and to that of farmers in an earlier period. The 1910s were years of prosperity on American farms, which benefited from expanded markets for U.S. farm exports. The theory of parity held that during these years commodity prices were sufficient to compensate farmers for the value of their work at a rate approximately equivalent to industrial workers, as determined by the purchasing power of their incomes. Those in favor of parity in the 1920s focused on the disproportionate effect of tariffs on farmers.

In the New Deal, the USDA turned an eye to the effects of agricultural instability on consumers and considered how farm policy could aid farmers and consumers alike. New Dealers hoped that restoring the purchasing power of rural consumers would bolster the nation's devastated economy and transform the South from dead weight into an economic engine.²¹ The Agricultural Adjustment Administration also had a small Office of Consumer Council tasked with advocating for consumer interests as the AAA pursued its primary goals of reducing production and raising farm prices.²² Furthermore, AAA administrators at the state and local levels understood consumer concerns to be important to farmers. In 1936, the chair of the first state AAA tobacco committee in North Carolina, C. T. Hall, gave a statement on behalf of the outgoing

²¹ On the importance of "purchasing power" to New Deal and war time economic policy, see Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

²² Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 29.

committee in which he surveyed their accomplishments and detailed his vision for future committee work in which he paid particular attention to this dynamic. "We must not overlook and fail to recognize and [we must] try to get the full support and cooperation of the consuming public . . . You have heard time and again that we wanted to adopt the policy of 'live and let live' but I say let's go further and adopt a policy of 'live and work to help others live.'" Hall suggested that consumers had an "unwarranted fear of organized agriculture," rooted in the misapprehension that fully cooperating farmers could raise the cost of food in the nation, acting on the principle that "'might makes right.'" Hall stressed that farmers, manufactures and consumers all relied upon on another. While the history of associationalism in the 1920s demonstrated that there was little chance of farmers behaving monopolistically, as Hall proposed, it is crucial that he considered farmers to be a dominant economic sector, on par with or even more powerful than consumers, and that farmers and consumers had a mutual stake in each other's economic wellbeing.²³

North Carolina's Commissioner of Agriculture, Kerr Scott, felt the same. In 1944, Everette Nichols, a high school student participating in a Future Farmers of America club public speaking contest, wrote to Scott seeking advice and information on

²³ C.T. Hall, statement, Minutes of Tobacco Growers Committee Meeting at State College Station, Raleigh, N.C., September 11, 1936, Box 18, Folder "Tobacco Correspondence, 1933-1936," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

his subject, "Farmer! Defend your Rights." ²⁴ Scott was intrigued by the question of this "young Patrick Henry," and sent a thoughtful and lengthy reply.²⁵ Scott first cautioned Nichols to think carefully about his rights, or those of farmers generally, in relation to the rights of other individuals and groups. He explained that not only was this approach to farmers' rights morally correct, as it recognized the rights and needs of others, it was also good politics. "Only by dealing fairly with other groups can you expect to have the sympathy of others in your program." The others Scott had in mind were consumers, with whom farmers should make common cause. "For instance," he asked, "should farmers exercise themselves over the problems of the consumer or should farmers be content to let the gulf between the producer and the consumer grow and grow and grow until the middleman has more than the lion's share and both the producer and consumer are reduced to low income and restricted rights?"²⁶ Scott and Hill put farmers and consumers on the same side, against manufacturers and processors, the classic middlemen long despised by agrarians. Scott's ties to the National Grange offer some indication of his sustained commitment to this farming for farm policies that saw farmers and consumers to be on the same side of this equation.

²⁴ Everette Nichols to W. Kerr Scott, December 6, 1944, Box 2, Folder "Cr-Fa," Department of Agriculture, Commissioner's Office, General Correspondence, 1936-1947, NCSA.

²⁵ W. Kerr Scott to Ross, undated note on Everette Nichols to W. Kerr Scott, December 6, 1944, Box 2, Folder "Cr-Fa," Department of Agriculture, Commissioner's Office, General Correspondence, 1936-1947, NCSA.

²⁶ W. Kerr Scott to Everett Nichols, December 21, 1944, p. 2, Box 2, Folder "Cr-Fa," Department of Agriculture, Commissioner's Office, General Correspondence, 1936-1947, NCSA.

In the years immediately following the war, Progressives who shared Hall's and Scott's beliefs about the shared interests of farmers, workers, and consumers began offering a critique of parity-based farm supports. They charged that these policies had failed to advance the best interests of any farmers or consumers, and had been especially ineffective in alleviating southern rural poverty. The Southern Conference for Human Welfare studied USDA and federal census information from which they determined that the economic and social conditions of in which many southern farming families labored remained one of poverty and exploitation. In spite of the strides made in public health knowledge in the first decades of the twentieth century and the governmental and philanthropic efforts at improving living conditions, the 1940 census found that rural southerners lived in crowded and dilapidated housing and suffered from malnutrition.²⁷

In North Carolina, the Extension Service directed considerable energies to rural health and sanitation improvement. Agents focused primarily on mosquito and rodent control, privy construction and animal waste control, and safe food storage. They surveyed the state and found uneven implementation of good health and sanitation practices across the rural areas of the state. For instance, in 1947, two-thirds of families involved in Home Demonstration Clubs in the south-east districts of the state had access

²⁷ Only 13.6% of Southerners lived in housing listed as "acceptable" by census takers; 27.8% was listed as "repairable," and 58.6% as "non-repairable." The in the remainder of the United States, 52.5% of housing was deemed acceptable and only 24.3% non-repairable. In those homes, 23.8% of individual lived in home with over 1.5 people per room, and 15% had "no toilet of any kind." "The South Needs Prosperous Farmers: Wartime Progress Must Go Forward," *The Southern Patriot* 3:8 (August 1945): 2.

to “a safe, adequate and convenient water supply.”²⁸ But, these encouraging numbers were offset by inadequate sanitation facilities. In Johnston County 1204 rural homes visited by Home Demonstration Agents lacked any kind of privy.²⁹ The SCHW charged that the AAA and the Production and Marketing Administration had failed landless farmers, and that persistent poverty was the result.

There were many reasons why this was so. Landowners captured many of the monetary benefits of the Agricultural Adjustment Act’s commodity reduction programs. They failed to deliver the rightful share of cash benefits to their tenant and share croppers and shifted the burdens of acreage reductions onto their shoulders by letting tenants go. Locally driven implementation procedures insulated abusive landlords from scrutiny, and economically vulnerable, landless and minority farmers lacked the political clout to protest successfully.

As the overall number of tenant farmers and share croppers fell precipitously between the 1940s and the 1960s, landlord and agency official appealed to “good management” as the primary reasons for reducing the tenant work force. In the 1940s, Robert Martin observed that while AAA rules prohibited landlords from reducing the number of tenants on their property in order to maintain a larger allotments or reduction payments for themselves, “the rules were extremely difficult to administer

²⁸ “Report of Housing in Relation to Health – 1947,” State – North Carolina, p. 1, Box 25, Folder “Health, 1945-1962,” North Carolina Extension and Community Association Records, 1916-2003, NCSU.

²⁹ “Report of Housing in Relation to Health – 1947,” p. 1, State – North Carolina, p. 1, Box 25, Folder “Health, 1945-1962,” North Carolina Extension and Community Association Records, 1916-2003, NCSU.

and a determined landlord could usually find a way to rid himself of unwanted tenants.” When tenants complained, landlords could justify their decisions “from the viewpoint of ‘sound management.’”³⁰ This explanation did not lose its potency over time. As the undersecretary of agriculture John Schnittker explained to the chair of the House agriculture committee in 1965 when questioned about safeguards for tenant in ASC allotment assignments, “Local ASC county committees, of necessity, must make some difficult determinations to distinguish between a reduction in tenants for purposes of participating in our programs and a reduction of tenants in the process of improving management for profitable farm operation.” Schnittker stated that it was the position of the USDA that “no one is in a better position to judge the merits of each individual case than the local farmer-elected committees.”³¹

After the war, progressives proposed adjustments to farm programs to help them better serve small farmers. Programs intended to work specifically with these groups such as the Resettlement Administration, part of the Farm Security Administration, suffered from limited scope, inadequate funding, and low prioritization within the USDA, especially after 1936.³² In August, 1945, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare made southern agriculture the primary focus of its monthly publication on

³⁰ Robert Martin, “Negro-White Participation . . .” p. 261.

³¹ John A. Schnittker to E. da la Garza, January 24, 1966, Box 4464, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan - April 1, 1966,” Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, General Correspondence of the Office of the Secretary, 1906-1970, RG 16, NARA.

³² This is a well-known narrative of AAA implementation in the South. Cite Daniel, Kirby. Also Raper, Law and Contemporary Problems, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men.

social conditions and public policy, *The Southern Patriot*. The SCHW applauded the New Deal's accomplishments: increasing average farm incomes, decreasing the number of tenants on southern farms, and expanding the availability of fair credit in rural communities.³³ The organization cautioned that "WE MUST NOT GO BACK."³⁴ They recognized that tenant farmers and share croppers bore the brunt of the burdens of the AAA, and their continued exploitation and poverty threatened southern political and economic progress. The SCHW used the USDA's own reporting to illuminate the fact that Southern farm continued to achieve the lowest yields of food and feed crops in the nation. The region's farmers tended the smallest farms, while earning the lowest incomes, of all U.S. farmers. The problem, the SCHW argued, was the region's continued over-reliance on cotton production and tenant labor.³⁵

The SCHW, therefore, favored policy measures aimed at "democratizing" access to land and encouraging crop diversification. They proposed in 1945 that the federal government should institute a "program with the development of family size farms as its aim." Such a program would involve the government's purchasing large tracts of farmland and reselling that land in small blocks to landless farmers, on long terms and with very low interest rates. "This is an American program, a democratic program, and

³³ "The South Needs Prosperous Farmers; Wartime Progress Must Go Forward," *The Southern Patriot* 3:8 (August, 1945): 1-2.

³⁴³⁴ "The South Needs Prosperous Farmers; Wartime Progress Must Go Forward," *The Southern Patriot* 3:8 (August, 1945): 1.

³⁵ "The South Needs Prosperous Farmers; Wartime Progress Must Go Forward," *The Southern Patriot* 3:8 (August, 1945): 1, 3-4.

alone can guarantee the living standard of the Southern farmer can be raised.”³⁶ The *Southern Patriot* argued that this redistribution of southern farmlands would fulfill the SCHW’s interpretation of the lost promise of Reconstruction, that of “forty acres and a mule for every Southern farmer – Negro and white.”³⁷ In order to prevent land speculation and intensified focus on soil depleting non-food crops, the SCHW recommended other measures to accompany their land proposal that would encourage crop diversification and soil conservation, make credit more easily available to tenants and small land owners, and support cooperative ownership of expensive farm equipment. Additionally, the SCHW suggested tax reforms that would exempt small farms from property taxes while greatly increasing taxes on “larger than family-size” farms.³⁸ The SCHW continued urging this program through late 1946, when they also came out in support of the new Farmers Home Administration (FHA).

Congress fashioned the FHA from the remnants of the Farm Security Administration (FSA), which, among other duties, had administered the 1937 Bankhead-Jones Tenant Farmer Act. This act allowed the federal government to finance long-term, low-interest farm mortgages for tenant farmers seeking to purchase land. These loans

³⁶ “The South Needs Prosperous Farmers; Wartime Progress Must Go Forward,” *The Southern Patriot* 3:8 (August, 1945): 4.

³⁷ “The South Needs Prosperous Farmers; Wartime Progress Must Go Forward,” *The Southern Patriot* 3:8 (August, 1945): 4.

³⁸ “The South Needs Prosperous Farmers; Wartime Progress Must Go Forward,” *The Southern Patriot* 3:8 (August, 1945): 4.

could cover as much as 100 percent of the purchase price.³⁹ Like the AAA, Bankhead-Jones was administered by farmer committees, who assessed loan applicants and the farms they wished to purchase to determine if both farmer and farm were capable of sufficient commercial production to repay the loan.⁴⁰ Critics of the bill in its first year worried that Bankhead-Jones loans would drive up farmland prices by enabling bidding wars and funding speculation, or, alternatively, that determinations of credit worthiness would be too conservative and restrictive to make any real impact. A critic of the latter school contended that the act's "benefits are limited to farm persons without land but the intention is clearly to make loans available to tenants who already have considerable accumulation. The highest type of tenant, in other words," would be the primary beneficiary of the act.⁴¹

Nearly ten years later, the SCHW found that Bankhead-Jones had indeed proven "highly inadequate."⁴² No rural land bubble had formed. Indeed, the number of FSA loans was far too few to make any real difference number of tenant farmers still laboring in the South.⁴³ The SCHW blamed Congress, led by southern Democrats, for under-

³⁹ The maximum term was 40 years, at 3 percent interest.

⁴⁰ Howard H. Gordon to W.C. Rambeau, August 16, 1943, Box 2, Folder "Farm Security Administration," Department of Agriculture, Commissioner's Office, General Correspondence, 1936-1947, NCSA.

⁴¹ James G. Maddox, "The Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 4:4 (October, 1937): 449. This issue the journal focused on farm tenancy, and two other articles also provide critique of Bankhead-Jones in the context of federalism and in historical perspective, respectively. See Albert Cotton, "Regulations of Farm Landlord-Tenant Relationships," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 4:4 (October, 1937): 508-538, and William G. Murray, "Governmental Farm Credit and Tenancy," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 4:4 (October, 1937): 489-507.

⁴² "The Southern Farmer: What Future?," *The Southern Patriot* 4:10 (November, 1946): 4.

⁴³ "The Southern Farmer: What Future?," *The Southern Patriot* 4:10 (November, 1946): 4.

funding the FSA when “the answer,” to cotton over-dependence and exploitation of tenant and migrant labor, “is more and more FSA – multiply FSA by one hundred or more.”⁴⁴ In August, 1946, the Farmers Home Administration (FHA)⁴⁵ replaced the FSA. In addition to providing home and farm mortgages directly from the government, the FHA would guarantee such mortgages when made by commercial banks. These loans would be available to all farmers, not just transitioning tenants. The SCHW hoped that the FHA could expand the its scope well beyond what Bankhead-Jones had been able to accomplish.

Above all, the SCHW feared that without robust programs to aid tenant farmer’s transition into landownership farms would grow to proportions that necessitated further expansion of tenancy and migrant labor systems. “Any government program to serve the farmers’ interest must be directed toward the goal of a land of family-sized farms. The farm operator and his family must have control over their resources and operations, have a farm big enough to provide a decent standard of living and small enough so the family can do the work without hired help or child labor.”⁴⁶ Reliance on any but family labor would reinforce inequality in southern society and inhibit

⁴⁴ “The Southern Farmer: What Future?,” *The Southern Patriot* 4:10 (November, 1946): 4. See also *Washington Post* editorial on Congressional obstruction of FSA appropriations, “Attack on FSA,” *Washington Post*, November 3, 1945.

⁴⁵ I will use “FHA” throughout to denote the Farmers Home Administration. This should not be confused with the Federal Housing Administration. The Farmers Home Administration is often abbreviated as the FmHA to avoid confusion where both institutions are discussed, but scholars of agriculture policy, as well as farm policy administrations themselves most often use simply the FHA.

⁴⁶ “The Southern Farmer: What Future?,” *The Southern Patriot* 4:10 (November, 1946): 5.

development. The SCHW favored progressive farming and the implementation of scientific methods, but within a social and economic structure that encouraged cooperation and ease the imperative to seek greater economies of scale.

While the SCHW proposed “more FSA” and a more aggressive campaign to facilitate landownership, Harry Truman’s secretary of Agriculture, Charles Brannan, was rethinking farm policy’s fundamental premise of parity-based price support. Brannan was responding to the same rural economic distress that concerned southern progressives. He believed parity-based farm support would never create the rural economic stability that was necessary for a thriving society. “If we are to have stable and prosperous rural communities with schools, churches, health, and other facilities, it is plain that many farm people need greater economic security and opportunity.”⁴⁷ In 1949 Brannan offered an alternative to parity-based policy for the new farm bill that would become known as the “Brannan Plan.” The Secretary asserted that his recommendations, though substantially different from previous farm legislation, were “not likely to startle anyone. I have no revolutionary ideas to present to you.” To those with vested interests in the established programs of parity-based support, revolution was exactly what Brannan’s plan threatened.

⁴⁷ “Statement by Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan,” reprinted from *Congressional Record*, April 7, 1949, p. 3, Box 6, Folder “C, 1948-50,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.



Figure 3: Charles Brannan as Secretary of Agriculture⁴⁸

Brannan found the parity price formulation of assistance levels to be overly concerned with per-unit commodity prices and insufficiently concerned with individual farmers' standard of living. In spite of parity goals, Brannan told Congress, "farm purchasing power turned downward in 1948 and is now at its lowest level since 1942."⁴⁹ He recommended a new formula that would guarantee a minimum income for farmers growing already-supported commodities, and proposed an expansion of the domestic allotment and marketing quota programs to perishable produce such as fruits,

⁴⁸ "Charles F. Brannan, 14th Secretary of Agriculture, June 1948-January 1953," United States Department of Agriculture photo, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usdagov/6303249600/in/photostream/> (Accessed April 16, 2013). Used with permission.

⁴⁹ "Statement by Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan," reprinted from *Congressional Record*, April 7, 1949, p. 1, Box 6, Folder "C, 1948-50," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

vegetables, and tree nuts. Such a program would encourage food production in addition to feed and fiber crops. It would also continue to generate some surplus of staple commodities, but Brannan argued that modest surplus, was desirable. "Free flowing trade," he declared, promoted peace, and when peace failed, ready reserves had proven invaluable during the war.⁵⁰

Like the SCHW, Brannan believed that the best kind of farm was one that was large enough to realize some efficiencies of scale, particularly the advantages of mechanization, but not so large as to require significant amounts of hired labor. He opposed farm policy measures that would "encourage the concentration of our farm land into fewer and fewer hands."⁵¹ The Secretary argued that a proliferation of small, independent family farmers was necessary for thriving rural communities and for the health of American democracy, and that farm supports were essential to preserving these communities. "One bulwark of democracy may be found in the prosperous rural community mainly composed of economically strong families farming in the traditional American pattern. It is an ever-present answer to communism."⁵² In order to buttress the family farm and off-set any policy incentives to form larger farms, the Brannan Plan

⁵⁰ The Brannan Plan would employ a mix of commodity loans, such as those already offered by the CCC for staples that could be stored. Farmers growing perishables would receive production payments not tied directly to a collateralized commodity.

⁵¹ "Statement by Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan," reprinted from *Congressional Record*, April 7, 1949, p. 5, Box 6, Folder "C, 1948-50," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁵² "Statement by Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan," reprinted from *Congressional Record*, April 7, 1949, p. 2, Box 6, Folder "C, 1948-50," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

proposed to cap the amount of subsidy support and production payments a farm could receive based on total farm production.

In addition to questions of democracy, the Brannan Plan made a case for farm support as part of the United States' general macroeconomic strategy. Brannan rejected the notion that farm sector support, even measures specifically for the benefit of small farms, should be understood as interest group legislation. "Unfortunately, too many people still think of a farm program as some kind of class legislation. There is too little appreciation of the direct and definite ways in which it can benefit all of the people and can help make this the kind of country they want it to be."⁵³ He explained in his statement to Congress that the economic welfare of agriculture and industry, farmers and workers, were closely aligned. Farm and labor policy should work in concert, for the good of the American people, both rural and urban, who required plentiful food and sufficient income with which to purchase it. Progressive industrial policy, especially policies that ensured workers earned good wages, was the best kind of agriculture policy, Brannan maintained. Likewise, coordinated agricultural policies that encouraged production and supported prices were good for workers because they helped to create the rural consumers industry needed to grow, and good for consumers because they reduced and stabilized food prices.

⁵³ "Statement by Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan," reprinted from *Congressional Record*, April 7, 1949, p. 1, Box 6, Folder "C, 1948-50," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

Brannan's recommendations for farm policy reform that would guarantee a minimum standard of living for farming families while also encouraging abundant farm production was very much in keeping with prevailing economic policy thinking on the left in the late 1940s. Labor unions in particular advanced a vision of an American marketplace characterized by full employment at fair wages, abundant production, mass consumption, and the government interventions necessary to achieve these goals.⁵⁴ Legislative initiatives such as the defeated 1945 Full Employment Act would have committed the government to create jobs when the private sector failed to provide sufficient numbers of jobs. The 1946 Employment Act compromised on some elements of the Full Employment Act, but it still affirmed the relationship between purchasing power and employment.⁵⁵ In his 1947 economic report to congress, president Truman asserted that "the Congress, by setting maximum purchasing power as the objective of National policy in the Employment Act, pointed to the importance of purchasing power in keeping our economy fully employed and fully productive."⁵⁶

It was in this intellectual environment that Brannan believed his recommendations to be neither startling nor revolutionary. Events proved him wrong. His plan faced immediate and overwhelming opposition from nearly all directions.

⁵⁴ Ezra Taft Benson considered the CIO's support for the Brannan Plan a major strike against it. See Ezra Taft Benson, *Freedom to Farm* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960), 181-183.

⁵⁵ Cohen, *Consumer's Republic*, 114-119.

⁵⁶ Harry S. Truman, *The Economic Report of the President to the Congress, January 8, 1947*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1947), p. 2.

North Carolina Extension Director at the time, I.O. Schaub, observed that individual farmers' opinions of the plan seemed to depend on how it would affect them personally. "One man told me that under the unit plan that he would have no alternative except to dispose of a large part of his holdings. Naturally, he does not approve of the plan. It is very likely small landowners will be in favor of the plan."⁵⁷ The Farm Bureau and larger producers generally opposed the cap on benefits. The proposal to shift from parity price supports to minimum income guarantees left conservatives sputtering that the Brannan Plan was rooted in socialism.⁵⁸ *Newsweek* advertised its exaggerated and unfavorable reporting of later USDA activities under the heading of a "New Brannan Plan," and on the presidential campaign trail in 1952, Dwight Eisenhower referred to the Brannan Plan as a "political monstrosity."⁵⁹ Brannan himself came under fire for handling the politics of his proposal badly, failing to secure a supportive coalition and underestimating the strength of vested interests.⁶⁰ As a viable policy recommendation, the Brannan Plan was a mere flash in the pan, quickly dismissed as impractical, though it would continue to haunt the Secretary Brannan and the Truman administration.

⁵⁷ I.O. Schaub to Harold Cooley, May 2, 1949, Box 6, Folder "C, 1948-50," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁵⁸ Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Walmart Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 86-88.

⁵⁹ "Text of the address by Dwight D. Eisenhower, Republican Nominee for President, Delivered at the National Plowing Contest, Kasson, Minn. And Broadcast over the nationwide network of National Broadcasting Company and the American Broadcasting Company from 12:00 to 12:30 P.M., Saturday Afternoon, September 6, 1952," July 12, 1952 to September. 14, 1952, p. 4, Box 1, Speech Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower: Papers as President, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, KS.

⁶⁰ Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 86-88

The policy revisions proposed by Brannan and the SCHW were not perfect. With their emphasis on land ownership and the creation of small, commercial farms, they made no effort to fill the gaps in existing labor policies. None of the New Deal's labor legislation, including wage and hour, unemployment, social security, and child labor laws applied to farm workers. Still, the strength of left critiques of parity-based farm policies was their recognition that not all farmers experienced the same effects of the farm economy's instability, nor enjoyed the same benefits of federal programs. Landless farmers and those with very small farms were especially vulnerable, and received less benefit from commodity subsidy programs than larger farms, as will become clear when we look closely at North and South Carolina farmers in later chapters. Brannan proposed limiting benefits of farm programs for larger farms, and in so doing cemented the opposition of the Farm Bureau and southern Democrats who retained influential positions in Congress. As even liberals shifted to the right in the early years of the Cold War, articulating class differences among farmers would become politically untenable. New interpretations of parity politics collapsed those categories and precluded possibilities for thoroughgoing farm policy reform.

Post-War Parity Politics

Parity achieved such salience in the 1950s because it captured the frustration that many farmers experienced with their position in the post-war economic order that left them feeling increasingly like junior partners in their relationship with consumers.

Leading voices in academia and the Farm State emerged to reinforce this perception. Willard Cochrane, an agricultural economist on the faculty at the University of Minnesota, published and spoke prolifically on the economics of the farm problem throughout the 1950s, and eventually joined the Kennedy administration as the USDA's chief agricultural economist.⁶¹ He carried the message that according to his research, which tracked farmers' income over time and compared it other non-farm incomes, farmers were indeed losing ground.

Cochrane's research showed a widening gap between farmer's gross income and their net income between 1910 and 1957. Farmer's gross incomes began a sharp climb in 1940, as did net farm income. However, net income peaked at in 1947 and fell for the next decade. According to Cochrane, farmers took in approximately \$21 billion gross in 1942 and realized a net income of approximately \$12 billion, a difference of \$9 billion. By 1948, gross income was up to nearly \$35 billion, but that number was now about \$17 billion more than net income. By 1957, the difference was closer to \$20 billion.⁶² The gap between national per-capita farm income in comparison to per-capita farm income from all sources combined showed similar trends. In 1950s, per-capita farm income lagged

⁶¹ Richard A. Leveins, "Foreward," in Willard W. Cochrane, *The Curse of Agricultural Abundance: A Sustainable Solution*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), ix; Tome Webb, "Willard Cochrane, JFK Advisor and U of M Agricultural Economist, Dies," *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (March 6, 2012) http://www.twincities.com/allheadlines/ci_20113831/willard-cochrane-jfk-adviser-and-u-m-agricultural (April 19, 2013).

⁶² Willard Cochrane, *Farm Prices: Myth and Reality*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), 21. All figures are qualified as approximated because in this popular format, Cochrane did not publish the exact numbers in a table. Instead, he showed them in a series of line graphs. I have approximated his figures here.

behind total population per-capita income by approximately \$1000.00. In 1957, the gap had widened to approximately \$1300.00.⁶³ Cochrane interpreted his findings to mean that “the incomes of commercial farm operator families have slipped badly in the midst of unparalleled prosperity.”⁶⁴

As in the 1920s and 1930s, parity advocates continued to identify surplus or over-production as the reason for farmers’ disadvantage in the market, but they identified different reasons for the persistence of surplus in the era of production regulation. Before the AAA, farmer’s disorganization was to blame. After the war, mainstream agricultural economists identified technological advances, many of which had been achieved in government-funded agronomy laboratories, as the root of the problem. Cochrane coined the term “agricultural treadmill” to describe the technological and economic imperatives that drove over-production of staple commodities. In this theory, land grant colleges and the Extension Service were government entities that existed primarily to conduct research into a host of potential methods for increasing agricultural productivity, increase farm incomes and standards of living. But as a strategy for increasing farm income, research alone was a Sisyphean task, Cochrane explained. First adopters of new technologies enjoyed increased yields and higher returns without moving the market in any significant way. Then as new methods came into wide-spread usage because of reduced costs to adapt them, observed effectiveness of adaptation, and

⁶³ Cochrane, *Farm Prices*, 22.

⁶⁴ Cochrane, *Farm Prices*, 24.

government policies that encouraged their usage, overall production increased. The result was surplus accumulation and the loss of market advantages for everyone as new base-line yields emerged. The new technology became a necessity for maximizing production in a lower price environment in which attainment of greater economies of scale was the only way to secure profits until the next production-boosting technology came along.⁶⁵ According to Cochrane, the problem of the treadmill was one with policy roots in the Extension and land grant

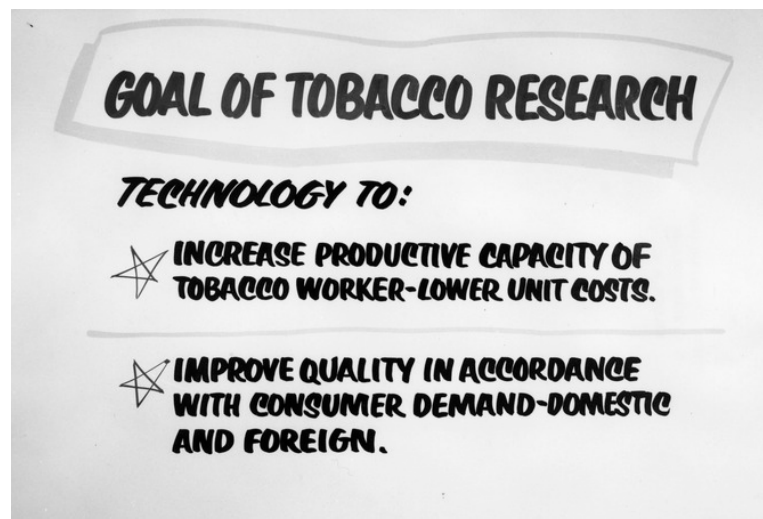


Figure 4: "Goal of Tobacco Research" – Informational Slide Used by North Carolina Extension Service, 1950⁶⁶

⁶⁵ A few observers strongly implied that halting new research into production methods at the land grant colleges and increasing marketing research until such time as the market "adjusted" might be one solution. C. B. Ratchford dismissed these ideas as absurd, and while advocating for marketing research, maintained that the efficiency facilitated by new production method research was essential to the American farmer's competitive position in the global market. (C. B. Ratchford, "N.C. Agriculture of the Future: What it will be Like and How We Can Serve It," p. 16-17, Box 3, Unlabeled Folder, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.)

⁶⁶ "Goal of Tobacco Research," 1950, Item 0050446, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina, <http://historicalstate.lib.ncsu.edu/catalog/0050446> (accessed April 16, 2013). Photograph used with permission.

systems, and it required sustained regulation of production to solve.⁶⁷ North Carolina Extension Director David Weaver observed this dynamic and concluded that parity-based farm support was essential to solve the farmer's dilemma. "Machinery has reduced costs, saved labor, speeded up production, and in general enlarged farms, but farmers as a class have not been able to take full advantage of all of these benefits. Study will reveal that the farmer has not retained unto himself the advantages that technology made possible."⁶⁸

Who did retain the benefits of technology, if not farmers, from this point of view? According to the rhetoric of parity, those benefits accrued to manufactures, processors, and consumers. Farmers were generating higher total receipts, but they were also paying more for their inputs such as labor, rent, machinery, chemicals, and seed than they had before then war. The result for farmers was ever-shrinking margins in a dynamic Cochrane popularized as the "price-cost squeeze." The price-cost squeeze was a short-hand phrase evoking the shrinking, per-unit farm profits in the 1950s and the slower rate of increase in agricultural commodity prices than the rate of increase in farm supply and consumer goods prices. Furthermore, the percentage of their incomes American consumers spent on food decreased sharply in the 1950s. Increased farm

⁶⁷ Cochrane, *Farm Prices*, 5-7; Cochrane, *The Curse of Agricultural Abundance*, 24-29.

⁶⁸ David S. Weaver, "The Challenge – Teamwork Approach to Agricultural Problems in North Carolina" [draft], p. 13, Box 1, Folder 6, David Stathem Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, NCSU.

productivity ensured Americans an inexpensive food supply, while at the same time manufactures provided a wider variety of consumer products to compete for individual's discretionary spending.⁶⁹

Though this explanation of the farm economics problems focused on the economics of food crop production, the price-cost squeeze paradigm resonated with Carolina farmers who specialized in cotton and tobacco. Neither crop could be classified as food, even though both crops had been included among the federally supported staple commodities from the earliest days of the AAA. Cotton, a fiber with industrial, military, and consumer uses, and tobacco, a product for recreation and a staple of military rations, should have been well-positioned to capture the growing consumer market in the 1950s United States. The greatest threat to Southern tobacco and cotton producers was not inelastic food demand, but rather domestic and foreign competition on price and quality.⁷⁰ Cotton also faced increased competition from cheap,

⁶⁹ Cochrane, *The Curse of American Agricultural Abundance*, 18-43. Agricultural economists of the pro-subsidy school such as Willard Cochrane argued throughout the 1950s that the money Americans spent on food had a predictable upper limit, above which they would not spend, even as incomes rose. Grocery spending might shift to higher priced foods like meats, over inexpensive staples, thus improving the quality of the American diet, but not significantly its quantity. Therefore, such thinking concluded, farmers faced limits on the advantages they could reap from increased consumer incomes

⁷⁰ Policy makers worried that competing countries would increase their own subsidy supports, driving up global supply and depressing prices. C. B. Ratchford argued that increased efficiency and economies of scale was the only viable answer to this competition. See C. B. Ratchford, "N.C. Agriculture of the Future: What It will Be Like and How We Can Serve It.," p. 16, Box 3, Unlabeled Folder, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU. In the early 1960s, South Carolina agribusiness boosters acknowledged that cotton was not and could not remain the staple of South Carolina agriculture. Californian producers did not have to contend with boll weevils, and benefited from a warmer growing season. By 1961, the majority of cotton used in South Carolina textile mills was imported from the West. "Carolina, California, Cotton," *The Columbia Record* (Columbia, S.C.), June 18, 1961. For a detailed accounting from the cotton milling industry's point of view on the competition

durable synthetic fibers -- “test tube fibers” the cotton industry called them – developed in corporate research labs.⁷¹ Carolina cotton and tobacco farmers experienced the same increase in the cost of their inputs with which food and feed commodity producers struggled.

The Rocky Mount *Evening Telegram* ran an editorial cartoon in 1953 that illustrated many farmers’ frustration with the price-cost squeeze. It also neatly encapsulated the political problem this dynamic represented.⁷² The cartoon blamed “the housewife” and her hunger for cheap, high-quality proteins and starches for the farmers’ economic problems. The artist depicted a woman who unthinkingly elbowed a passive and aggrieved farmer as she ate from a full plate, uncaring that the reduced prices she paid for the food created economic hardship for farmers. In this popular narrative of the price-cost squeeze, farmers provided a service to the American consumer but received little respect or appreciation from a public that grew increasingly disconnected from and unsympathetic toward farm problems. An editorial in the Robersonville, NC, *Weekly Herald* struck the same tone: “many people want the farmer

synthetic fibers posed for cotton and wool, see “Textiles: An Industry Woven into Fabric of State,” *The State* (Columbia, S.C.), June 4, 1961.

⁷¹ On the expansion of smoking in the United States and the world in the twentieth century, see Allan M. Brandt, *The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Product that Defined America* (New York: Basic Books, 2007). On the twentieth century cotton market see Timothy Curtis Jacobson and George David Smith, *Cotton’s Renaissance: A Study in Market Innovation*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁷² *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, N.C.), March 2, 1953, 4A.

to produce life-sustaining food for free while they spend their money for pleasure gadgets. Despite parity prices and farm programs of every type and nature, the consumers are still getting a bargain from the farmers of this country.”⁷³



Figure 5: "One Man's Meat," Rocky Mount Evening Telegram, May 6, 1953⁷⁴

The price-cost squeeze posed more than an accounting problem for farmers. It summarized the growing competition between two powerful and distinct political constituencies – farmers and consumers – whose opposing interests clashed over the fundamental issue of meat and potatoes. The *Weekly Herald* described the demand for

⁷³ Editorial, "Still Getting a Bargain," *Weekly Herald* (Robersonville, N.C.), April 1, 1953.

⁷⁴ Unknown cartoonist, "One Man's Meat," *Rocky Mount Evening Telegram*, (May 6, 1953). Cartoon reproduced by permission of the Rocky Mount Telegram

cheap food as a moral failing for consumers who, by spending more on their “pleasure gadgets” and less on their groceries, selfishly reduced farm incomes. Extension officials and other farm policy makers approached the question from a different perspective, not blaming the housewife for her greed, but rather hoping to cure her ignorance about rural conditions. Officials in the 1950s determined that agriculture had a “public relations problem.” If the housewife, as consumer, and her husband, as wage earner, better understood the economics of farming and the farmers’ need for their fair share, then the American family would be willing to support tax-payer funded agricultural programs. If such programs were successful, they argued, farms would prosper and families would not need to choose between their gadgets and their groceries.⁷⁵ Framed in this way, the question was not whether or not to provide parity-based support to farmers. The only possible question was, how much support farmers should receive. Parity provided a point of reference from which to address this question.

More than an abstract concept, parity was the mathematical basis on which the USDA determined yearly crop support prices, or the “loan rate” at which the Commodity Credit Corporation issued no-recourse commodity loans.⁷⁶ From 1933 to 1948, the office of the Secretary of Agriculture use a formula to determine what price for

⁷⁵ For one of the best articulations of this problem, see David Weaver, “The Public Must Understand Agriculture,” David Stathem Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 1, NCSU, n.d. [1950s]. On post-war consumer politics, see Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic*.

⁷⁶ For an detailed discussion of parity formulations, see E. C. Pasour, Jr., *Agriculture and the State: Market Processes and Bureaucracy*, (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1990), 81-84.

individual commodities reached the level of parity in a given year. The USDA derived this figure by multiplying the average price of a commodity between 1910 and 1914 by the “Index of Prices Paid by Farmers of Commodities and Services, Interest, Taxes, and Wage Rates,” otherwise known as the “parity index.” The parity index also used 1910-1914 the base period. In 1948, the USDA updated the formula to determine parity based on the average price of the most recent decade and the index of all commodity prices for the same ten years. The index of prices paid for farm supplies and consumer goods continued to take the 1910-1914 period as its base.

By the late 1940s, farm programs did not subsidize commodities at the full price determined by this equation, but instead at some percentage of this price. How to determine this percentage became the main point of contention between opposing camps of parity advocates. One side favored Congressional mandates of rigid subsidy levels at 90 percent of parity. Another favored more discretion for the Secretary, giving him the authority to set support prices within a lower, flexible range of 60 to 80 percent of parity. The necessity for flexible price supports was the constant refrain of Eisenhower’s Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson, throughout his eight-year tenure at the USDA. Benson, backed by the American Farm Bureau, and many Republicans favored less extensive and more flexible support for agriculture. Many Democrats, farm district congressmen, and farm organizations representing smaller farms such as the National Farmers Union argued for guaranteed higher levels of parity

support.⁷⁷ When the Senate agriculture committee called Benson, then the presumptive nominee for Secretary of Agriculture, to testify about his plans for the Department in January, 1953, some Senators unsuccessfully tried to extract from him a commitment to maintain farm subsidies for all supported commodities at 90 percent of parity throughout his term. He refused.⁷⁸

Instead, Benson led the charge in the early 1950s for flexible parity. “The truth, obscured though it might be,” he later wrote, “was that agriculture needed 90 per cent parity supports about as much as an athlete needs a strait jacket.”⁷⁹ He began to compare farm programs to unemployment insurance, characterizing farm subsidies as a kind of disaster insurance meant to provide a safety net in extraordinary circumstances, not a permanent intervention into the agricultural economy to provide long term stability.⁸⁰ The Rocky Mount *Evening Telegram* supported Secretary Benson and took their cue from him. “The unemployment insurance program for industrial workers helped tide a man over a bad period but didn’t guarantee his normal salary, and the intent of the farm program was not too different,” the paper opined. “Farmers had

⁷⁷ Ezra Taft Benson (as told to Carlisle Bargerdon), *Farmers at the Crossroads*, (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1956).

⁷⁸ “Hearing before the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, United States, Senate, Eighty-Third Congress, First Session, on the Anticipated Nomination of Ezra Taft Benson, of Idaho, to be Secretary of Agriculture,” January 15, 1953, p. 6.

⁷⁹ Ezra Taft Benson, *Cross Fire: The Eight Years with Eisenhower*, (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc.: 1962), 73.

⁸⁰ “Hearing before the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, United States, Senate, Eighty-Third Congress, First Session, on the Anticipated Nomination of Ezra Taft Benson, of Idaho, to be Secretary of Agriculture,” January 15, 1953, p. 6.

some reason to feel that when the whole economy was shored up with controls and regulations, all for the protection of somebody, they should not be the only unprotected group.”⁸¹ Nevertheless, the editors maintained, Benson’s plan would move the farm economy toward a more free market, with farm price controls “reduced to more reasonable – and less expensive – proportions.”⁸²

The Rocky Mount paper generally favored local commercial interests in its editorial stance, but the nearby Robersonville paper served a rural readership of tobacco farmers. The Robersonville *Daily Herald’s* editors declared that Martin County farmers would support an unsubsidized agricultural economy only if and when industry gave up protective tariffs, labor gave up the minimum wage and social insurance, and the airline industry renounced rate and fare regulations. Until “monopoly is scrapped, when all concessions are denied others and when guarantees are withdrawn from all groups,” Benson and his supporters should “keep their contemptible mouths shut.”⁸³ The *Herald’s* editors advanced an argument for nearly full parity, maintain that farmers as an industry and as a social group merited protections at least as much as industrial workers and regulated corporate monopolies.

This disagreement between large and small farmers and between farmers and other economic sectors was a debate over the manner in which farm support fit within

⁸¹ Don Whitfield, “Benson Launching New Program for Farmer,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, N.C.), March 1, 1953, 1A.

⁸² Editorial, “Free Enterprise,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, N.C.), March 2, 1953.

⁸³ Editorial, “Asked to Carry the Load Alone,” *Weekly Herald* (Robersonville, N.C.), March 4, 1953.

the liberal state. For New Dealers of the 1930s and 1940s agriculture programs were part of a developing social safety net and system of economic regulation that was supposed to stabilize the American market economy. The editors of the Robersonville *Herald* found New Deal order regulatory policies for other industries threatening. They saw labor protections and regulated monopolies as a source of farmers' woes. The editors viewed these policies with the same skepticism that R.W. Slate, the Greensboro furniture seller quoted above, applied to agriculture policies.

Mutual suspicion emerged when proponents of economic policies that should have been understood as related instead staked out oppositional positions. Ezra Taft Benson believed that Americans had come to see farm programs as a necessary evil. "They go along because this appears, as they have been told again and again, to be the cost of preserving the family farm in America." But "what the American people will not stand for under any circumstances is prolonged, conspicuous waste."⁸⁴ The conservative rhetoric of flexible parity, with its comparisons to unemployment or disaster insurance evoked a much less expansive approach to farm supports. The purpose was not to guarantee a minimum standard of living, but to provide a cushion from the market's lowest extremes.

The weakness of the both the conservative and progressive positions was that they ignored an inescapable reality of 1950s agriculture. When David Weaver asserted

⁸⁴ Benson, *Freedom to Farm*, 195.

that farmers did not retain the advantages of increased agricultural efficiency, he was wrong. Some farmers did retain those advantages, and they did so at the expense of other farmers through a process advocated by Weaver's own agency. An NC State College-based Extension columnist in the *Wilson Daily Times* reminded farmers that these were "just about the only ways the individual farmer can beat the price squeeze of higher costs and lower prices."⁸⁵ Extension agents suggested farmers cope by increasing the size of their farms, by bringing previously unused land into production, and automating tasks. The often unacknowledged effect of increasing farm sizes in the early 1950s was the loss of smaller farms when their owners sold their land or rented it to other farmers with the means to increase their land holdings.

This is why smaller farmers, and their representative groups such as the National Farmers Union, preferred higher levels of parity support. They turned to Washington, pleading their case. "I am writing to ask if you have forgotten your promise to the farmers of the U.S.A. the year of 1952 when you were asking the people to elect you to the highest office of the land," one Selma, NC, farmer wrote to Eisenhower. He demanded to know why the administration was contemplating setting supports at lower levels of parity and closed by imploring the president to remind his secretary of agriculture of their campaign promises. A woman from Lucama, NC, got straight to the

⁸⁵ William L. Carpenter, "Increasing Size of Farm Business May Help Improve Labor Efficiency," *Wilson Daily Times*, January 9, 1953. Willard W. Cochrane, *Farm Prices: Myth and Reality*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958); Willard W. Cochrane, *The Curse of Agricultural Abundance: A Sustainable Solution* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

point in a short note. "Mr. President, I don't like your Parity Reduction Program for farmers. We must live too you know. Small Famers are already almost defunct."⁸⁶

High levels of parity had done small farmers very little good, but with the demise of the Brannan plan, maximizing parity benefits was the best of the bad options remaining to small farmers.

Conclusion

In February 1958, the Saulston Township Farmer's Club of Wayne County [North Carolina] wrote to Eisenhower to "voice their objection" to the President's "non-support of ninety per cent [sic] of parity on farm commodities." "Ninety per cent [sic] of parity may not be the solution to bring to the farmer a fair share of the national income, but we feel that if it is lowered" it would greatly "detrimental" to agriculture. Nineteen club members signed the letter, all listing their occupation as farmers.⁸⁷ Their petition captured the problem of parity politics. It failed to offer a real solution for farmer's economic problems, but it was also a position from which retreat was impossible. Even Benson and Eisenhower would not officially recommend that Congress end parity until they neared the end of their terms in office, when the gesture was no more than symbolic and offered no alternative support schemes for small farmers such as the

⁸⁶ Ellen Raper to Dwight Eisenhower, February 8, 1958, Box 13, Folder "Farm Program, February 1958," RG 145, NARA.

⁸⁷ J. Norwood May to the President of the United States, February 11, 1958, Box 13, Folder "Farm Program, February 1958," RG 145, NARA.

Brannan Plan had proposed.⁸⁸ The focus on the percent of parity issue came at the expense of real debates about the effects of farm programs upon the detrimental effects of commodity overproduction. It served only to isolate farmers from workers and consumers, painting their interests as oppositional rather than allied. It also provided the USDA no viable political path out of the domestic allotment system that was proving woefully insufficient to off-set technologically created over-production and the concentration of farmland in fewer hands as growers sought economies of scale.

Parity-based arguments for continued farm support thus prevailed. Pro-parity advocates maintained that policy decisions fed surplus accumulations and necessitated more expensive supports to farmers who nonetheless saw their margins shrink. Those same farmers proved a vocal constituency that asserted the right to interest group treatment, not just as individual workers doing their duty for the nation, but as an industry like the regulated airlines or tariff-protected steel production whose essential place in the economy demanded special protection. Farm supports also benefited consumers who enjoyed low food prices and increasingly diverse ways to spend their growing disposable income, but the politics of parity set these groups in opposition, precluding meaningful inquiry into or critique of the source of the surplus or questions about why farm programs disproportionately benefited larger farms.

⁸⁸ Benson, *Freedom to Farm*, 193-194.

With the inauguration of the Kennedy administration, questions of parity in farm policy were paramount at the highest levels of American government. Advised by Willard Cochrane, in 1960s John F. Kennedy spoke the language of the price-cost squeeze on the campaign trail. "Here is a concept which strikes to the heart of the farmer's problem," Kennedy explained, in a pithy and enduring explanation of the paradigm. "It does not concern itself directly or solely with prices - with what the farmer receives - but with his net income, his return, the only figure which is meaningful in determining his standard of living, particularly in this age of the cost-price squeeze. For the farmer is the only man in our economy who has to buy everything he buys at retail - sell everything he sells at wholesale - and pay the freight both ways."⁸⁹ If inter-war parity had been about capturing tariff revenues and the advantages of collective bargaining for agriculture, post-World War II parity was re-construed into exactly the frame for farm policy that Brannan had deplored: interest group politics.

The question became not simply whether or not farm subsidies and production regulations would endure in the absence of the emergencies of Depression and war , but the character of farmers' relationship to those programs. The price-cost squeeze justification had the potential to make farmers clients of the farm agencies that aimed to

⁸⁹ John F. Kennedy, "Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, National Plowing Contest, Sioux Falls, SD - (Advance Release Text)," September 22, 1960. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* < <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=74149> > (October 1, 2012). See Cochrane obituary crediting him as the author of this line. Tome Webb, "Willard Cochrane, JFK Advisor and U of M Agricultural Economist, Dies," *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (March 6, 2012) http://www.twincities.com/allheadlines/ci_20113831/willard-cochrane-jfk-adviser-and-u-m-agricultural (April 19, 2013).

ease those conditions, a position of weakness and dependency that was exactly opposite of the arguments for economic democracy and cooperative action that had animated farm program supporters in the 1930s. As Benson's successor in the office of Secretary of Agriculture complained: "In selling agriculture, I think that Benson's great disservice to the country and the Department of Agriculture was in the field of public relations because in the process of his struggles to stamp out commodity programs, he slapped a label of surplus and subsidy on the back of every American farmer and we haven't been able to scrape it off yet."⁹⁰ In this context, the concept of the "self-administered" and democratically legitimated farm program was more politically important than ever.

⁹⁰ Orville L. Freeman, recorded interview by Charles T. Morrissey, July 22, 1964, p. 27, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

Chapter 3: The Problem of the Agricrats

Dwight Eisenhower delivered the most important address on agriculture policy of his first presidential campaign in South Dakota at the National Plowing Contest. There, to the assembled crowd and to a broadcast audience, Eisenhower challenged the administrative status quo of the U.S. Department of Agriculture after two decades of Democratic presidents. He asserted that the general principles of federal farm programs were “sound.” This was because they were originally designed to include farmer participation in policy development. “But what happened,” in the interim years, he asked. “Do you have a voice that carries weight with the Washington agricultural autocrats? Or should I say ‘agricrats’? Do they listen to you? Do they welcome your farm organizations’ leaders in their councils? You know they don’t.”¹ Eisenhower declared that the “agricrats” had “grown cynical and arrogant” from being too long in office, and that the Democratic Party would “make the farmer a political captive” by inciting fear that a Republican administration would undermine the federal programs on which they had come to depend. He pledged to sweep the agricrats out of the USDA

¹ “Text of the address by Dwight D. Eisenhower, Republican Nominee for President, Delivered at the National Plowing Contest, Kasson, Minn. And Broadcast over the nationwide network of National Broadcasting Company and the American Broadcasting Company from 12:00 to 12:30 P.M., Saturday Afternoon, September 6, 1952,” July 12, 1952 to Sept. 14, 1952, p. 2, Box 1, Speech Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower: Papers as President, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, KS.

and to “transform” farm programs “into genuinely farmer-run operations, with maximum responsibility decentralized to states, counties, and districts.”²

As we have seen, the institutions that enabled farmer administration of agriculture programs at the local level arose largely in answer to the dispersed nature of American agriculture. Unlike other rate-setting executive agencies, the USDA’s regulatory agencies did not discipline an oligopoly. Rather, the Department structured the production of multiple commodities by millions of farmers in thousands of counties across the nation. In order to do so, administrators turned to established networks in farm communities to implement the AAA in the summer of 1933 by creating committees of farmers who distributed acreage allotments to neighboring farms and ensured that all farmers complied with the new restrictions on production and marketing of subsidized commodities. This system – which contemporary supporters nearly always referred to as the “farmer-elected committee system” – was also integral to the implementation of economic democracy in farm programs.

Local offices of the AAA and its successor agencies became key institutions in rural counties where regulated commodity crops accounted for the majority of agricultural production. Farmers interacted with the offices in multiple ways. They received production allotments and marketing quotas from their committees, and

² Eisenhower, 2, 5.

worked with agency staff to implement conservation practices. Through the county offices, farmers received conservation incentive payments and cost sharing funds, and Commodity Credit Corporation loans that supported crop prices. Agency personnel, often hired within the community, visited individual farms to measure fields and determined if farmers complied with crop reduction and conservation contracts. Many farmers served on the committees themselves, if not at the county level, then at the community level, as each township elected three to five people every year to these positions. A steady stream of public relations work in the form of newsletters, newspaper columns, and radio and television appearances kept AAA, Production and Marketing Administration, and Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation offices in the public eye.

The importance of this division of the USDA resonated in Washington, as well. The leadership of the USDA at the highest levels had strong ties to the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and its successor agencies. The USDA division responsible for overseeing allotments in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the PMA, was the largest branch of the Department, in terms of personnel and budget. Congressional delegations relied on local committees as sources of constituent support, and Senators enjoyed the custom of choosing state committee candidates. The PMA's reach and influence attracted scrutiny of its operations at the local and national level in the early 1950s, as the White House and the office of Secretary of Agriculture changed hand from

Democrats to Republicans for the first time since the AAA became law. As Secretary, Ezra Taft Benson reorganized the USDA and revised the manner in which local offices managed their affairs, and Benson's changes to the Department sparked a firestorm of controversy.

When we untangle the threads of the ensuing debates, we see two separate but related tensions at work in the politics of farm program administration, both of which were apparent in Eisenhower's campaign speech. First, there was the tension between centralization and decentralization in program administration. Decentralized administration was a hallmark of farm support programs. Proponents of the system insisted, just as they had during the 1930s, that farmer participation was essential to effective implementation of and support for production regulations. They cited the committee system as a compelling example of grassroots politics and democracy in action. Critics of the committee system in the 1950s argued that as an administrative mechanism, the committees had outlived their usefulness. Professional managers, they maintained, were required to keep up with the volume and complexity of farm program work, and that committee membership had become static and less than democratic in practice. The Secretary of Agriculture required stronger ties to local offices to ensure that policies would be carried out uniformly and effectively across the nation. To accomplish this goal, Benson instituted new rules to govern the committees' elections and actions.

Partisan politics formed the second focus of contention. Centralizers and decentralizers generally separated onto opposite sides of the party fence for most of the 1950s. Republicans, led by Ezra Taft Benson, favored stronger centralized control by the USDA, while Democrats, most vocally Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey, staunchly defended the autonomy of the committee system. Republicans had grown frustrated and impatient with perceived Democratic control over farm programs at all levels, and seized the opportunity presented by a Republican administration to work their way into local offices in the South, while Democrats reacted to what they interpreted as a partisan power-grab, intended to turn farm programs into a machine for Republican patronage.

By the early 1960s a new narrative of the committee system emerged. It held that over the course of the 1950s the committee system had grown stale and that the farmers who served on them became nothing more than local figure heads. Benson and his rules were to blame. The Kennedy administration took office and perpetuated this notion, while taking credit for revitalizing grassroots democracy in agriculture. The new Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman of Minnesota, launched an exhaustive study of the farmer committees in order to determine how to fix what Benson had broken. But Freeman's researchers drew many of the same conclusions that Benson reached a decade prior. The committees were too independent and too difficult for the office of the Secretary to direct.

The hundreds of committeemen across the country, once a great asset in implementing the centralized control of American agricultural production, had themselves come to stand in the way of further administrative centralization, as the USDA came to see greater control over production and conservation programs as necessary to their success. The political party in charge defined that success, however. Yet, even as the USDA grew convinced that the committees were too troublesome, they also conceded that democratized administration, even the watered down version that emerged from the Benson years, remained essential to the effectiveness of production controls. Without them, farmers would not support the programs at all. Troublesome the committees may have been, but they were also indispensable.

County Committee Work

The local offices of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and its successor agencies, the Production and Marketing Administration and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, became very important institutions in farm communities after 1933. Their work touched nearly every farmer in the country, and many individuals participated in the administrative duties for which the offices were responsible, not only as elected officeholders but as full time and seasonal staff. These offices administered a number of programs for regulation of commodity production and the implementation of conservation measures. They also oversaw the distribution of loan funds, including the Commodity Credit Corporation's no-recourse commodity

loans and credit for developing storage facilities on individual farms. PMA and ASC offices were busy and active centers of government with which most farmers experienced frequent and meaningful interaction. But how did these offices actually go about these tasks?

Production and Marketing Administration committees set the acreage allotments and marketing quotas on regulated crops grown in their counties. They enforced compliance with allotment regulations and imposed penalties when they encountered violations. This was a time-consuming task that required careful administration and familiarity with the regulations specific to several individual crops. In 1952, the Edgecombe County PMA office administered tobacco and peanut allotments on more than thirty-six thousand acres, and administered price support loans for nine commodities. Inspectors that year discovered forty-one farms that overplanted their allotments on tobacco and peanuts or who harvest these crops without allotments at all, for which the committee assessed and collected fines.³ This was the routine, seasonally driven work that kept allotment and quota programs functioning.

Local committees also determined what conservation practices would be eligible for implementation assistance in the county. Allotment and conservation regulations

³ “1952 Annual Report of the Edgecombe County Production and Marketing Administration,” Tarboro, N.C., p. 4, in possession of Edgecombe County Cooperative Extension Service, Tarboro, North Carolina (copy in author’s possession).

had been tightly linked since the 1937 Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act and the 1938 Agricultural Adjustment Act. Linking commodity reduction and support payments to conservation practices, and drawing those payments from the treasury rather than from a dedicated tax on processors, was the work-around devised by Congress to circumvent the Supreme Court's objections to the first AAA. This brought conservation implementation through measures separate from those undertaken under the auspices of the Soil Conservation Service under the purview of the AAA offices.⁴ The ASC also oversaw the Soil Bank program, instituted in 1956, which took land out of commodity production and planted those acres in soil-building cover crops or, more often in trees, create a "bank" or "reserve" of replenished land.⁵ The county committees distributed all payments associated with these programs.

In 1951, the Edgecombe County PMA committee met with representatives of the Extension Service, the Soil Conservation Service, the Farmer's Home Administration, and the Forest Service. In this meeting, "fourteen practices were set up on which payments could be made to eligible farmers. These practices covered several phases of conservation from increasing soil fertility to erosion control and water conservation."⁶

⁴ Theodore Saloutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal*, (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1982), 236-237.

⁵ The Soil Bank program was the forerunner to today's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

⁶ "1952 Annual Report of the Edgecombe County Production and Marketing Administration," Tarboro, N.C., p. 4, in possession of Edgecombe County Cooperative Extension Service, Tarboro, North Carolina (copy in author's possession).

Approved practices in the county included fertilization, winter cover crop planting, terracing, pasture building, drainage, and tree planting.⁷ The county PMA office issued \$90,000.00 in payments for these practices to 817 farmers in 1952.

Local PMA and ASC offices employed sizable full time and part time staff to carry out this work. Three- to five-member elected county committees made most of the policy decisions and oversaw the office staff of the AAA and PMA offices. Community or township committeemen also kept abreast of program rules and acted as important sources of information for their neighbors. At a rate of three to five committeemen per township, the cadre of community committeemen could be quite large, but the committees were only part of the ASC apparatus at the county level. Office workers such as secretaries and loan clerks staffed the office year round. In addition, the committees hired many temporary workers, often also local farmers, to assist the committee the mammoth task that was measuring individual fields to determine if farmers were in compliance with allotments. In 1954, Edgecombe County hired nearly forty people to pre-measure 1,948 allotments before planting and to spot check an additional 540 allotments in May and June.⁸ PMA and ASC workers were a regular and visible presence in the farm community, and their work affected every individual

^{7 7} “1952 Annual Report of the Edgecombe County Production and Marketing Administration,” Tarboro, N.C., p. 4-5, in possession of Edgecombe County Cooperative Extension Service, Tarboro, North Carolina (copy in author’s possession).

⁸ “Edgecombe 1954 ASC Annual Report,” Tarboro, N.C., p. 4, 17-18, in possession of Edgecombe County Cooperative Extension Service, Tarboro, North Carolina (copy in author’s possession).

farmer. (See Table 3 for a compilation of the basic administrative work undertaken by selected ASC offices in North Carolina in 1960.)

County committees met regularly to complete these tasks. The Edgecombe County committee met an average of once a week in the 1950s and 1960s.⁹ The proceedings for PMA and ASC meetings were confidential and closed to the public by both custom and statute. The 1938 Agricultural Adjustment Act required the USDA to keep private much of the information obtained about farmers in the process of administering allotments and quotas.¹⁰ The USDA also believed that closed meetings were appropriate because “it is necessary in many instances for the county committee to discuss, with individual farmers, things which are of a rather personal nature. It would hamper operations and cause farmer resentment to have matters they consider personal to be aired in public.”¹¹

ASC offices published general notes and announcements about their activities. In October, 1958, the Rocky Mount *Evening Telegram* described the typical agenda of a county committee meeting.¹² The committee discussed pending business on ASC

⁹ “ASC News,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, N.C.), October 20, 1958.

¹⁰ Marvin L. McLain to T. Ashton Thompson, January 23, 1958, Box 3076, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan 1 to March 31,” RG 16, NARA.

¹¹ Marvin L. McLain to T. Ashton Thompson, January 23, 1958, Box 3076, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan 1 to March 31,” RG 16, NARA.

¹² Minutes were taken at these meetings, but I have never encountered any such minutes in the archive. Other historians have told me that minutes were supposed to be destroyed after a period of years, but I have never seen this rule stated in the archive either. Like the Edgecombe County PMA/ASC annual reports that

programs, including the details of program operation and individual applications from growers for loans and cost-sharing, or for reconsiderations of their allotments and quotas. At least once a month, they would also discuss the operation of the local office, including staffing problems and any ongoing duties of field workers. County agents and district USDA officials from the ASC often attended these monthly meetings. Farmers were allowed to attend meetings when they had individual business with the committee, but they also regularly visited the ASC office to conduct business.¹³

I obtained from the county Extension office, I believe such minutes probably do exist in storage in local offices. Finding them would be a challenge to undertake for manuscript revisions.

¹³ "ASC News," *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, N.C.), October 20, 1958.

Table 3: Activities of Selected County ASC Offices in North Carolina, 1960¹

County	Number County Committeemen*	Number Community Committeemen	Full Time Office Staff	Part Time Staff and Land Measurers	Number of Program Cropst	Individual Allotments Administered^	Farms Participating in ACP
Duplin	4	39	10	62	3	2967	40% of county
Edgecombe	4	42	12	25	3	3991	827
Granville	6	45	6	45	3	3331	986
Person	5	27	7	26	3	2967	627
Sampson	4	57	14	18	4	11330	1870
Wayne	5	60	9	70	4	6070	957

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**Ex-officio* member (County Agent) included in this number, alternates not included

^ The number of allotments does not equal the number of farms in the county.

† This number includes only crops grown in the county for which allotments and quotas were in effect in 1960.

These committees also oversaw wheat, corn, wool programs

¹ “Duplin County 1960 Annual Report,” Kenansville, N.C.; “Granville County, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation, 1960 Annual Report,” Oxford, N.C.; “Person County, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation, 1960 Annual Report,” Roxboro, N.C.; “Sampson County, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation, 1960 Annual Report,” Clinton, N.C. ; “Wayne County ASC Highlights, 1960, An Annual Report,” Goldsboro, N.C, Box 5, Folder “Reports, May, 1961, RG 145, NARA. “Edgecombe County ASC Annual Report, 1960” Tarboro, N.C., original document possession of Edgecombe County Cooperative Extension Service, Tarboro, North Carolina (copy in author’s possession).

The work these committees completed was important to individual farmers when it was simply the routine of assigning allotments, overseeing conservation efforts, and distributing program benefits. These decisions took on additional significance when responding to inevitable conflict, such as when farmers disagreed with their allotment and quota assignments or when they broke the rules, or were accused of breaking them.¹ These cases involved any number of unique circumstances that required investigation and application of the rules to individual circumstances. Most such cases are difficult to discover in the archive, due to the confidentiality of committee meetings, but some routines are evident from their annual reports. Local committees spot-checked crop plantings to determine if farmers remained within their allotments, and when they found over-plantings, they required excess crop be destroyed and assessed fines where appropriate. They also investigated violations of conservation contracts, such as a farmer's failure implement conservation measures for which he had been paid. Committees also made adjustments and allowances when disasters struck, preventing the full implementation of conservation measures agreed to or begun in

¹ This leaves aside entirely the more difficult to investigate possibility of corruption or incompetence of committee members or staff, including colluding with individual farmers to ignore over plantings. The measuring of land to determine allotment areas was less than precise. See Chapter 4 for discussion of the margin of error involved in actual measuring and the administrative response to this problem. But the difficulties of obtaining accurate land measurements using tools with limited precision was only part of the problem. Anecdotal evidence suggests that land measurements were sometimes not taken at all, with officials signing off on allotment compliance without fully verifying the area. This is not addressed at all in archival sources I encountered.

good faith. County committees dealt with nearly all such incidents locally, with the advice or review of the State Committee when necessary. When growers disagreed with local decisions, they could appeal to the State Committee, which in turn conducted audits of county offices.²

The most dramatic or egregious cases of contract violations or irresolvable conflicts with county and state committees sometimes came to the attention of congressional representatives.³ Take for instance, one South Carolina land owner who appeared before the Aiken County ASC committee in the summer of 1959. A tenant harvested grain from land included in a soil conservation scheme, in violation of the landowner's contract with the ASC. The landowner denied all knowledge of the tenant's plans to harvest until after the job was complete, but the ASC office assessed fines and demanded repayment of conservation funds. To the committee, the landowner wrote, "Gentlemen, I feel that I have been a victim of circumstances and am completely innocent of any willful wrong doing as I received no compensation what-so-

² Office of the Administrator, Correspondence and Administrative Records, 1956-1960, Box 1, RG 145, NARA, contains audits of North Carolina ASC offices from the early 1960s. Most documents report paper work discrepancies. Examples of common problems include: incorrect forms used, forms initialed by unauthorized officials, or officials used an incorrect formula to calculate payments or fees. Some audits included visits to individual farms to verify that conservation practices under contract were actually implemented. Auditors also visited farm retailers to view required paperwork in support of ASC cost sharing and loan payments.

³ I have used these examples, rather than the more routine cases, because the routine cases are almost impossible to find in the archive. There are extensive records (over 2000 record storage boxes) of the ASC in the National Archives at College Park, MD, RG 145.7, but they are entirely unprocessed, without even a preliminary inventory and no easily discernible organizational scheme. There could be numerous cases in these files, but they are currently inaccessible.

ever . . . for grain harvest on this land.” The dispute made it all the way to Strom Thurmond, to whom the landowner turned for help, before he settled satisfactorily with the county committee.⁴

A more complicated case arose in 1959 when the Hardin family of Iva, South Carolina, clashed with their county and state committees over accusations that they grazed cattle on land set aside for tree planting under a conservation contract. The county committee, in the absence of its chairman, determined in an investigation that the violation had been an accidental incident in which a neighbor’s cattle wandered onto the Hardin’s land. The State Committee, in a separate investigation undertaken at the urging of the county committee chair, determined instead that “the violation was knowing and willful.” The Hardins, they implied, rented the land as pasture to their neighbor. The cattle had not simply strayed. The family received notice to refund the conservation payment they received in 1959, plus civil penalties, a total of \$5,103.28, or “your name will be placed on the Register of Persons Indebted to the United States.”⁵ The Hardins were evidentially frightened by this possibility, for the phrase tuned up repeatedly when their friends launched a letter-writing campaign to Strom Thurmond.

⁴ M. J. Toole to J. R. Woodward, October 13, 1959, Box 1, Folder 5-2, Strom Thurmond, Subject Correspondence 1960, STI.

⁵ Marvin L. McLain to Strom Thurmond, Box 1, Folder 5-2, Strom Thurmond, Subject Correspondence 1960, STI; W. H. Barksdale to J. W. Hardin, Jr., April 7, 1960, Box 1, Folder 5-2, Strom Thurmond, Subject Correspondence 1960, STI.

They request help for the family, whom they described as in difficult financial circumstances and deserving of leniency.⁶ An attorney working on their behalf accused the county committee chairman of “prejudice against the Hardins.”⁷ In spite of pressure from Thurmond, the ASC office in Washington upheld the state committee’s determination, and the Hardins were forced to repay the conservation funds, although the committee relented on the civil penalties.⁸

From the available record, it is impossible to tell if the Hardins broke the rules or if the county ASC chairman really was pursuing a grudge, but making just this kind of judgment was the regular task of the AAA, PMA, and ASC farmer committees. In cases both routine and exceptional, the ASC committees at the state and county level held considerable influence over the manner in which farmers planned and pursued their farm work. These committees determined how much a farmer could grow and market of the staple commodities. They also set the rules for implementing conservation measures, and the penalties for breaking the rules could be stiff. For these reasons farmers had a real stake in the manner in which county and state PMA and ASC offices conducted their business. It was no surprise that in 1953, when the Eisenhower administration

⁶ J. E. Ridgeway to Strom Thurmond, April 29, 1960; Strom Thurmond to A. S. Hall, April 27, 1960; John B. Wilson to Strom Thurmond, April 30, 1960, Box 1, Folder 5-2, Strom Thurmond, Subject Correspondence 1960, STI.

⁷ William P. Green to Strom Thurmond, Box 1, Folder 5-2, Strom Thurmond, Subject Correspondence 1960, STI.

⁸ Strom Thurmond to John B. Wilson, May 9, 1960, Box 1, Folder 5-2, Strom Thurmond, Subject Correspondence 1960, STI.

introduced changes to the rules that governed how the committees functioned, these actions stirred up considerable interest and no small amount of controversy.

Centrality of Administrative Politics

Southern farming communities exhibited mixed feelings about Dwight Eisenhower's appointee for Secretary of Agriculture. Ezra Taft Benson's roots were in the west. His family was among the first Mormon pioneers of Utah, and Benson himself was born in Idaho in 1899. He obtained his undergraduate education at Brigham Young University and a master's degree in agricultural economics from Iowa State College in the late 1920s. Afterward he and his wife returned to Idaho where they joined his brother on the family farm. Benson did not remain a farmer for long. After two years he took a position as a county agent for the Idaho Extension Service, and soon became the first head of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Marketing at the University of Idaho.⁹ In 1933, Benson became the secretary of the Idaho Cooperative Council, leading to his appointment in 1939 as the secretary of the National Council of Farm Cooperatives. The council was a Washington-based lobbying group that represented the interests of cooperatives large and small including the raisin and dairy giants, Sun-

⁹ Carlisle Bargerdon, "About Ezra Benson," in Ezra Taft Benson (as told to Carlisle Bargerdon), *Farmers at the Crossroads*, (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1956), ix-x; "Celebration of Leadership," University of Idaho, <http://www.uidaho.edu/celebrationofleadership/events/A%20Legacy%20of%20Leading> (July 11, 2012); Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 112.

Maid and Land O'Lakes. Benson's ties to agricultural cooperatives reflected his generally associationalist approach to farm politics, and he was a vocal and staunch opponent of the New Deal farm programs, which he denounced as "paternalistic" and as antithetical to the "free enterprise" system.¹⁰



Figure 6: Ezra Taft Benson as Secretary of Agriculture¹¹

¹⁰ Benson likened New Deal farm programs to communism in his 1960 history of American agriculture policy. See Ezra Taft Benson, *Freedom to Farm* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960), 157-158. On Benson's belief in cooperative organization to address market problems and his experiences of the 1920s, see *Freedom to Farm*, 69-85. Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 112; Edward L. Schapsmeier and Frederick H. Schapsmeier, "Eisenhower and Ezra Taft Benson: Farm Policy in the 1950s," *Agricultural History* 44 (Oct 1970): 370-372. On associationalism and agriculture, see Chapter 1 and Victoria Saker Woeste, *The Farmer's Benevolent Trust: Law and Agricultural Cooperation in Industrial America* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1998); David E. Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal: American Farm Policy From Hoover to Roosevelt, 1928-1933*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

¹¹ "Ezra Taft Benson, 15th Secretary of Agriculture, January 1953-January 1961," United States Department of Agriculture photo, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usdagov/6302727317/in/photostream/> (Accessed April 16, 2013). Used with permission.

After Eisenhower's election, eastern North Carolina newspapers printed extensive articles trying to take the measure of the man who would lead the USDA. The Robersonville *Weekly Herald* mused, "One of the things [farmers] particularly want to know is how Secretary Benson feels about price supports." They looked to his past statements, in which Benson articulated his preference for "flexible" parity over "high, mandatory" or "rigid" price supports. They also looked to his affiliations, not just with the cooperatives councils, but with the Mormon church where he was a member of the governing body and whose leaders were "reported to be against price-support and relief payments of any kind."¹² By existing legislation and Eisenhower's own campaign promises, Benson would be locked into high, mandatory supports for most commodities, including tobacco, cotton, and peanuts – the crops of most concern to the *Herald's* readers – through 1954. But in 1954, for the 1955 crop season, he would be free to propose new plans.¹³ The vehemently pro-New Deal paper in Robersonville, North Carolina, worried that Benson would reduce price supports at the earliest opportunity.

¹² "Congress Worried Over Downward Trend in Prices, Secretary Benson Likely to be First to Get White House Call," *Weekly Herald* (Robersonville, NC), January 7, 1953.

¹³ "Congress Worried Over Downward Trend in Prices, Secretary Benson Likely to be First to Get White House Call," *Weekly Herald* (Robersonville, NC), January 7, 1953; "Text of the address by Dwight D. Eisenhower, Republic Nominee for President, Delivered at the national Plowing Contest, Kasson Minn. And Broadcast over the nationwide network of National Broadcasting Company and the American Broadcasting Company from 12:00 to 12:30 P.M., Saturday Afternoon, September 6, 1952," July 12, 1952 to Sept. 14, 1952, p.4, Box 1, Speech Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower: Papers as President, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, KS.; Schapsmeier and Schapsmeier, "Eisenhower and Ezra Taft Benson: Farm Policy in the 1950s," 369; D. Hamilton, *From New Day to New Deal*.

Benson's initial statements in office fed these fears. At his first press conference, he distributed what one historian has called a "free-market manifesto." His "General Statement on Agricultural Policy" denounced planned and subsidized economies – a characterization he applied to American agriculture under production controls – as demoralizing and destructive of individual character and industry.¹⁴ Observers who feared an end of farm price supports took this as a sign of things to come. The Robersonville *Weekly Herald* editorialized that "the American farmer is being maneuvered in the helpless position where he'll be carrying the load alone in support of a 'realistic' economy proposed by" Benson, Republicans, and "quite a few reactionary Democrats" whom the editors accused of betraying the New Deal.¹⁵ The Republican chair of the Senate agriculture committee had just recently called the president of the Commodity Credit Corporation and the director of the PMA before the committee and lectured them on the "unrealistic" nature of the farm programs.¹⁶ These Republican law makers voiced hopes that Benson would start with a "clean slate" when he took over the USDA.¹⁷

Benson looked back to a product of the Truman era for a model of how to achieve that clean slate. In 1947, Congress convened the Commission on the

¹⁴ S. Hamilton, *Trucking Country*, 112. On the detrimental effects of farm programs on individual farmer efficiency, see Benson, *Freedom to Farm*, 153.

¹⁵ Editorial, "Lip Service Only," *Weekly Herald* (Robersonville, N.C.), March 11, 1953.

¹⁶ Joe Hall for the Associated Press, "Farmers Demand Strong Program," *Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, N.C.), January 16, 1953.

¹⁷ Joe Hall for the Associated Press, "Farmers Demand Strong Program," *Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, N.C.), January 16, 1953.

Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, commonly known as the “Hoover Commission,” to examine the operations of Executive Branch departments and independent regulatory commissions. It was widely anticipated that Truman would lose the 1948 election, and the Republicans’ original goals for the commission were to identify ways to scale back the New Deal era growth of the administrative state.¹⁸ The tone of the commission altered when Truman defied expectations and won re-election,¹⁹ and the commission produced recommendations that strengthened or affirmed the New Deal order by reinforcing the prerogatives and authority of the managerial presidency.²⁰

The inclination to favor managerial authority, known as orthodox administrative theory, was a guiding philosophy of the Hoover Commission’s final report. This theory of managerial government holds that effective administration must involve distinct lines of authority, clearly defined realms of responsibility, and meritocratic personnel

¹⁸ See William E. Pemberton, “Struggle for the New Deal: Truman and the Hoover Commission,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 16:3, (Summer 1986): 516.

¹⁹ Scholars of political science explain this about-face in the commission’s goals by pointing to Truman’s intensified interest in the Commission after his reelection. Hoover himself, an architect of the final report, had been a leading proponent of corporatist government in the 1920s. But he was also an administrator who believed that if a government official was to be held accountable for carrying out public policies, they must have sufficient authority to accomplish the task. Peri E. Arnold, “The First Hoover Commission and the Managerial Presidency,” *The Journal of Politics*, 38:1 (Feb. 1976): 46-70; William E. Pemberton, “Struggle for the New Deal: Truman and the Hoover Commission,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 16:3, (Summer 1986): 511-527.

²⁰ See Peri E. Arnold, “The First Hoover Commission and the Managerial Presidency,” *The Journal of Politics*, 38:1 (Feb. 1976): 48.

procedures.²¹ Also integral to this theory is that managers must have authority equivalent to their responsibilities. According to this approach, an administrative official such as the Secretary of Agriculture cannot be held responsible for successful policy implementation if he has less than full authority to oversee and direct that implementation. Stemming from this understanding of executive authority, the Hoover Commission preferred a fully top-down approach to administration that could not be further from the reality of program administration in the USDA.

The Hoover Commission recommended strengthening the authority of the Secretary and dismantling the farmer committee system.²² The recommended reorganization of the department would have created more streamlined hierarchies, reduced redundancies, and redistributed some realms of responsibility between the USDA and the Department of the Interior. The Commission found the Department to be too segmented, a “loose confederation of independent bureaus and agencies” that diffused the authority of the Secretary of Agriculture.²³ The Commission also singled out the many farmer committees – such as the PMA and Extension committees – as both too expensive and disruptive to the USDA’s ability to implement farm programs. “A multitude of county advisory committees of farmers has been created and employed. . . .

²¹ Peri E. Arnold, “The First Hoover Commission and the Managerial Presidency,” *The Journal of Politics*, 38:1, (Feb., 1976): 48.

²³ *The Hoover Commission Report on the Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1949), 237

The task force on agricultural activities believes that the local committees should be purely advisory on program formulation and operation. All administrative work should be done by departmental or State employees.”²⁴ They recommended the dissolution of “redundant” farmer committees and the establishment of one advisory council per county “as aids to orderly operations in the field.” The Commission took pains to explain that “these councils should be advisory” only. They should consider all program proposals, but “it is not the sense of this recommendation that they should have ‘veto power.’”²⁵

In 1951 and 1952 Congress held hearings on a bill designed to implement many of the Hoover Commission’s recommendations for the USDA.²⁶ While the legislation stood little chance of passing a Democratic congress or of securing President Truman’s signature, the 1950 hearing proved a dress rehearsal for the more serious challenge to the status quo at the USDA after Eisenhower’s election. The cast of characters was nearly the same, and the arguments for and against the farmer committee system foreshadowed the more vehement assertions later in the decade. On one side stood Senate agriculture committee Republicans, led by Vermont Senator George Aiken, the

²⁴ *The Hoover Commission Report*, 245.

²⁵ *The Hoover Commission Report*, 246.

²⁶ “Reorganization of the Department of Agriculture,” Hearings before the Committee on Expenditures in Executive Department, United States Senate, 82nd Congress, 1st Session on S. 1149, August 28, 29, September 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 18, 1951; “Reorganization of the Department of Agriculture,” Hearings Before the Committee on Agriculture, House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, 2nd Session, March 26, 27, 28 and April 3, 1952.

American Farm Bureau, and some more conservative Democrats in favor of implementing the Hoover Commission's recommendations. On the other side, North Carolina representative and chair of the House agriculture Committee Harold D. Cooley, the National Farmers Union, most southern Democrats, and the Truman administration's leadership of the USDA, including Secretary of Agriculture Charles Brannan, who asserted that the Commission's recommendations for the committees was based on "a great deal of misunderstanding."²⁷

When Ezra Taft Benson became Secretary of Agriculture, he significantly reorganized the USDA to the extent that he could do so without Congressional approval. He evoked the Hoover Commission's findings as the justification for his actions. "Our plan to reorganize the Department was based on a detailed, non-political study completed long before I became Secretary, on the recommendations of a Committee on Government Organization set up by President Truman."²⁸ The Hoover Commission was in no sense "non-political," though it was bi-partisan. The fact that it was conducted under the Truman administration was justification enough for Benson.

²⁷ "Reorganization of the Department of Agriculture," Hearings Before the Committee on Agriculture, House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, 2nd Session, March 26, 27, 28 and April 3, 1952, 5. See also summary of Brannan's testimony on HC proposals for PMA committees, summary of John A. Baker, National Farmers Union, "Reorganization of the Department of Agriculture," Hearings before the Committee on Expenditures in Executive Department, 558-560. See also lines of questioning pursued by Cooley as chair of House Ag Committee, 17-19.

²⁸ Ezra Taft Benson, *Cross Fire: The Eight Years with Eisenhower*, (Garden City: Double Day & Co., Inc.), 103.

He needed this political cover because his reorganization of the USDA primarily targeted the division of the Department that oversaw the acreage allotment programs by dismantling and renaming the Production and Marketing Administration. All of the USDA's authority to regulate agricultural production rested in the PMA. The PMA was also a conduit for USDA leadership. By 1952, two undersecretaries of agriculture had started their administrative careers as AAA and PMA county committeemen.²⁹ At the end of his term, Benson looked back on the PMA and levied this scathing assessment: "The production and Marketing Administrations had become in a sense almost bigger than the Department itself. The tail was wagging the dog. I wanted to cut it down to size."³⁰ Benson mouthpiece Carlisle Bargerdon portrayed the Secretary as the new sheriff in town who defied the entrenched interests at the USDA at his own political expense to reign in the PMA agrocrats.³¹

Benson redistributed some functions of the PMA and renamed the division that continued to oversee linked production and conservation regulations the Commodity Stabilization Service. The local offices that had previous been known as the PMA offices

²⁹ "Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees," p. 41.

³⁰ Benson, *Cross Fire*, 52.

³¹ Carlisle Bargerdon, "About Ezra Benson," Benson, *Farmers at the Crossroads*, xiv. For Benson's description of the process of reorganizing the PMA, see Benson, *Cross Fire*, 52-53.

became the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation offices (ASC).³² The 1953 annual report for the Edgecombe County, North Carolina ASC office asserted that “with the change in name . . . very little change in duties of this agency was made.” The office continued to oversee allotments, quotas, and price supports and to administer the Agricultural Conservation Programs (ACP). The farmers committees remained intact as did those of the Extension service, Farmers Home Administration, and the Soil Conservation Districts.

If the administrative duties of county offices did not change with the transition from the Production and Marketing Administration to the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation service, there was a shift in power between the local committees and the USDA career staff. The USDA imposed term limits on farmer committee members at all levels: state, county, and community. Benson also altered the manner in which committeemen were elected. Previously, the county PMA office administered its own elections. Benson created election boards independent of the county committee, but comprised of the administrative directors of other local farm agencies, such as the FHA and SCS and the county officers of the Farm Bureau and the Grange. Committeemen

³² For an official genealogy of the AAA to today’s Farm Service Agency including the transition from PMA to CSS/ASC see “About FSA: Agency History,” <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=about&subject=landing&topic=ham-ah>, accessed July 19, 2012. See also “Edgecombe County A.S.C. Annual Report, 1953,” Released May, 1954, Tarboro, North Carolina, in possession of the Edgecombe County Cooperative Extension Service (copy in author’s possession).

also became subject to term limits and capped the number hours per year for which they could be paid for committee work.

The most important and controversial rule change related to the management of local ASC office. The new rules required each county committee to hire an office manager. Benson attempted to present this new requirement in the best possible light. He and his staff argued that the managers were a necessary addition to assist with the practical difficulties associated with operating a large and growing agency.³³ No longer would committees be burdened by bureaucratic work that took members away from their farms and discouraged some from seeking office. Instead, Benson explained, “the State and County committees will in effect serve as a ‘board of directors’ to determine policy, but they will not be asked to spend their time on routine administrative matters.”³⁴ Committees would continue the work of assigning quotas and allotments. They would still determine what conservation practices would be supported in the county, and apply the rules to individual cases as needed.

Other administrative work, such as supervising office staff and land measures, would fall to the manager. The manager would also advise the county committee on policy changes and maintain communication with the State Committee. This last duty

³³ Announced new regulations March 26, 1953. “Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees,” p. 101; Testimony of Earl M. Hughes, Administrator of the Agricultural Conservation and Stabilization Service, “Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees,” p. 8-10.

³⁴ “Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees,” p 103.

was crucial for, as a political scientist who studied the farmer committees in the early 1950s (and who was in sympathy with Benson's proposals) asked: "Is it feasible to decentralize administrative control over a program which, by its nature requires national uniformity?"³⁵ Strengthening the ties between county and state committees though the manager would help achieve this uniformity.

As an entirely appointed body, the state committee reported directly to the ASC director and the Secretary of Agriculture in Washington. They were accountable to the USDA for the effectiveness with which they administered policy by overseeing the work of the county committees. The state committees had always functioned this way, since the early days of the AAA. The USDA favored highly recommended candidates of the same party as the sitting president who were successful commercial farmers, and appointees attained the positions often with the strong support of at least one senator from their state, who used their the committees for patronage appointments. The state committee served as a resource to advise the county committees and to act as an appellate body to challenge local decisions.

The formal establishment of the county office manager took advantage of this existing institutional design to tighten the links between the state and county committees. Many counties had hired office managers of their own accord well before

³⁵ Reed L. Frischknecht, "The Democratization of Administration: The Farmer Committee System," *The American Political Science Review*, 47:3 (Sep., 1953): 705.

the 1953 mandate,³⁶ but those managers had been purely local employees accountable only to the county committee. By creating a formal position for a manger with standard duties and lines of authority separate from the elected committees, county managerial positions strengthened the USDA's control over the day to day operations of county ASC offices. Opponents to the new requirement for an office manager and the formal incorporation of that office into the USDA hierarchy charged that the secretary had circumvented the elected committees and the will of the farmers by instating appointed administrators. The Secretary could not affect the outcomes of local elections, but he could undermine the committees' independence and reduce the farmers' elected representatives in the USDA to little more than yes-men of the new county office managers and the appointed State Committees.³⁷

Local USDA employees – such as the staff members of the ASC county offices, including office managers, were not part of the civil service.³⁸ They received pay and benefits on a scale analogous to civil service structures, but the USDA kept managers outside of the civil service in order to signal the elected committees' continued

³⁶ Marvin L. McLain to Morgan M. Moulder, 3-13-1958, Box 3076, Folder "Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan 1 to March 31 [1958]," RG16, NARA.

³⁷ Frank K. Woolley, Legislative Counsel, American Farm Bureau Federation, to Senator Hubert Humphrey, June 28, 1956, as reprinted in "Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees," pp. 162-163.

³⁸ Marvin L. McLain to Spessard L. Hollad, March 5, 1958, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, General Correspondence of the Office of the Secretary, 1906-1970, "Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan 1 to March 31 [1958], RG 17, NARA.

independence in the administration of their offices. As Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Marvin McLain explained to a senator in 1958, "Because of the manner in which their funds are derived and expended, and the way in which their personnel are elected and selected, ASC county committees have long been considered "instrumentalities of the United States' as distinguished from regular federal offices."³⁹ In theory, the committees therefore had authority over their managers, whom they could hire and fire at will, "without cause." In reality, however, office manager hires and dismissals required the approval of the State Committee, and the State Committee.⁴⁰

It was not clear what kind of real authority this arrangement allowed the elected committees to retain. An Iowa farmer and long-time committee member insinuated that men such as him would not continue to serve in the new structure, and that farm programs would suffer from the loss of their experience and leadership. "Now when you eliminate experienced committeemen what will happen," he asked his congressman. "I have stated that as a figurehead I will not permitt [sic] my re-

³⁹ Marvin L. McLain to Spessard L. Hollad, March 5, 1958, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, General Correspondence of the Office of the Secretary, 1906-1970, "Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan 1 to March 31 [1958], RG 17, NARA; Marvin L. McLain to Lyndon B. Johnson, 2-18-1959, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, General Correspondence of the Office of the Secretary, 1906-1970, "Committees 1, Community-County-State, Feb 13 to July 7 (1 of 2) [1959], RG 17, NARA.

⁴⁰ County committees that could not or would not work with the state committee's favored choice for office manager could be, and sometimes were, dissolved. One such conflict led to the temporary dismissal of the Halifax County, NC, committee in 1957. W. Kerr Scott to Ezra Taft Benson, Jan 8, 1958 Box 3076, Folder "Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan 1 to March 31, 1958," RG 16, NARA; Marvin L. McLain to W. Kerr Scott March 10, 1958, Box 3076, Folder "Committees 1, Community-County-State, Jan 1 to March 31, 1958," RG 16, NARA.

election.”⁴¹ Others objected to the imposition of term limits. A Sampson County, North Carolina, high school teacher of vocational agriculture, C. Marion Butler, wrote to his congressman in 1954 that “I feel that the present regulations and the way the Committeemen have been elected has proved satisfactory and that the farmer should have the privilege to elect who he wished to serve as Community and County Committeemen, regardless of number of years he has already served as a committeeman. Some of our best ASC Committeemen, men who get the job done, have been with the Program for a number of years.”⁴² Butler and others argued that term limits contributed to shift of experience and expertise away from the elected farmer committeemen. Less seasoned committees would rely heavily on the expertise of the managers. Ironically, by 1960 Butler would become the Sampson County ASC county manager.⁴³

To opponents of the managerial system, this looked like an attack on the economic democracy. Benson recalled that upon restructuring the committee system, “immediately I was accused by the Democrats of crippling a mechanism through which

⁴¹ Charles Young to Ralph Harvey, September 18, 1954, Box 2382, Folder “Committees 4, Community, County, State, Aug 19 - [1954],” RG 16, NARA.

⁴² C. Marion Butler to Alton A. Lennon, July 19, 1954, Box 2383, Folder “Committees 4, Community, County, State, Apr 23 to Aug 18,” RG16, NARA.

⁴³ “Sampson County Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation, 1960 Annual Report,” Clinton, North Carolina, Box 5, Folder “Reports, May, 1961,” RG 145, NARA.

American farmers gave expression to their desires.”⁴⁴ The sticking point for many Benson opponents was that the restructuring of the PMA and the local committees came by administrative fiat, bypassing both the committees and Congress. The National Farmers Union pressed Congress for a response that would limit the Secretary’s ability to alter the committee structure. Such action, the NFU argued, would provide the committees with “prestige” and “give them something that they could rely on, something that could not be done away with because somebody in the Department [of Agriculture] decided that he should issue a directive and the program would go in the other direction.”⁴⁵ R.M. Evans, the first chair of the Iowa State committee and later the national AAA administrator, warned the Senate that “to allow this [committee] set-up to be liquidated will start America on the road to a new type of government. It is just that serious.”⁴⁶

Partisan politics fueled this controversy. Benson believed that local committees had become Democratic party strongholds who used their influence to support Democratic congressmen.⁴⁷ While local committeemen ran for office independently, the partisan composition of most committees generally reflected that of their

⁴⁴ Benson, *Cross Fire*, 52.

⁴⁵ “Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees,” p. 80.

⁴⁶ “Abuses and Disruptions of the Elected Farmer Committee System,” Report, Together with Minority Views, of the Subcommittee on Administration of Farm Programs of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, United States Senate, Eighty-Fourth Congress, Second Session, September 10, 1956 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1956), p. 6.

⁴⁷ Benson, *Cross Fire*, p. 52.

constituencies.⁴⁸ In the South, where Democrats reigned over local politics despite losing the presidency, Republicans chafed at their continued marginalization on local committees and staff positions. “Are the democrats so intrenched [sic] in office,” complained the Stokes County, NC, Republican Executive Committee chairman in 1954, “that they hold a permanent mortgage on all . . . offices in the Agriculture Department?”⁴⁹ Managerial positions, filled with the approval of appointed state committees, local Republicans realized, could provide the party an advantageous perch in the ASC’s administrative staff. The Missouri Republican State Committee vice chair instructed a county party chairperson that farm program employees “should be Republicans if we can lend our energy to see to it that they are.”⁵⁰

The connections between the committees and Congress meant that congressional Democrats on the agricultural committees took notice of the changes taking place in the ASC. This scrutiny reached a peak in the mid-1950s as the new rules took full effect. The sitting state committees of 1953 had been almost entirely replaced by 1956 with new appointees, many of whom lacked experience on the county committees. As these new committees exerted their control over the implementation of the other Benson policies,

⁴⁸ Remembering that “the electorate” here is not the population in general, but rather the voting participants of farm program in each county.

⁴⁹ M.O. Jones to Ezra Taft Benson, January 16, 1954, Box 2383, Committees 4, Community, County, State, Feb 11 - April 22 [1954], RG145, NARA.

⁵⁰ “Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees,” p. 104.

conflicts and scandals, large and small, erupted in many states, including North Carolina, Minnesota, and Missouri. In response, Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey introduced new legislation in 1955 to restore the administrative functions of the committees, and held a series of related hearing in Washington, D.C., and Jefferson City, Missouri. The hearings provided the opportunity to investigate the Benson restructuring and a brewing crisis in Missouri involving the dismissal of several county committees by the new state committee.⁵¹

From his position as chair of the hearings, Humphrey assailed Benson and his policies. He described his feelings as a “full scale burn” of anger over the altered committee rules and the resulting conflicts in his home state of Minnesota.⁵² Humphrey accused the USDA of exploiting the system for patronage at the expense of grassroots democracy and charged Eisenhower with violating his campaign promises. Far from ousting the agricroats and returning the farm program to the farmers, the Eisenhower administration had reduced the farmer-elected committees to “geldings” without any meaningful authority.⁵³ The subcommittee’s report would extend the metaphor, asserting that “if followed to its logical end, this pattern could administratively sterilize

⁵¹ M.O. Jones to Ezra Taft Benson, January 16, 1954, Box 2383, Folder “Committees 4, Community, County, State, Feb 11 - April 22 [1954, RG145, NARA.

⁵² “Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees,” p. 35.

⁵³ Statement of Norris Dodd, Phoenix, Ariz., “Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees,” p. 45.

the elected farmer committee system, and permit the rise of a bureaucracy and patronage system reaching into every rural community of America.”⁵⁴

Humphrey also expressed skepticism of the managerial system of local government in use across the country. Like the institution of a professional civil service, the managerial system had been a Progressive Era innovation meant to encourage local government by professionals and experts who could apply specialized knowledge to their tasks and achieve effectiveness, efficiency, and honest dealings from inefficient and corrupt local governments. In practice local government by managers could also be used to subvert democratic politics by minimizing the role of elected officials and placing decisions in the hands of appointed officials.⁵⁵ Humphrey stated during the hearings on the committee system his suspicion of the managerial system in general, and his concern that managers’ lack of independence in the revamped ASC system would substitute appointed authority for that of democratically elected officials. “I studied my public administration, but I was never convinced of the managerial form unless he happened to be an unusually good manager. . . . If you have one of these county managers or city managers and you have the council in your hand, you [the manager]

⁵⁴ “Abuses and Disruptions of the Elected Farmer Committee System,” p. 1.

⁵⁵ For a contemporary view of the adoption of city manager forms of government during the Progressive Era, see Alice M. Holden, “Commission and City Manager Government,” *The American Political Science Review*, 9:3, (August, 1915): 561-563. On business and professional group’s preference for commission and managerial government, see Samuel P. Hays, “The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* (October 1964): 157-169.

can manipulate [the council] pretty well. When you are in a position of power, you don't have to worry too much about those people. I have been opposed to that. That is one of the reasons I felt we ought to try to keep this system as close to the people as we can."⁵⁶ Humphrey worried committee memberships would become "honorary" positions, with the real authority transferred to the managers, and by extension, the Secretary of Agriculture.⁵⁷

The Senate agriculture committee called the chairman of the Missouri State ASC Committee, Murray Colbert, to testify in order to determine the scope of county managers' duties and the lines of authority. As Humphrey quizzed the chairman, the fine distinctions between the scope of the county committees' policy making authority and that of the USDA in general became apparent. Also apparent was the dual role of the county manager, on one hand the administrative office of the county committee's official functions, and on the other the agent of the Secretary of Agriculture in each county, there to enforce the department-level policies. Colbert explained the duties of the manager in light of the committeemen's reduced hours. "The county manager does the work that is outlined by the Secretary of Agriculture so far as administrative purposes are concerned. . . . The county committee [is] . . . employed when actually needed, and their services are limited to so many days a year. During the time they are

⁵⁶ Hubert Humphrey, "Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees," p. 39.

⁵⁷ Hubert Humphrey, "Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees," p. 39.

working, the office manager is directly responsible for the administration of that office, but he does not and should not on any occasion set policies.” The manager, then, was there to oversee office staff and conduct the administrative paperwork each local ASC office generated. These procedures were determined in Washington, not subject to the discretion of managers *or* committeemen. Humphrey summarized Colbert’s explanation: “In other words what you are testifying to is that policies are made at the departmental level.” Colbert conceded this was correct. When Humphrey took the point further to ask, “you are saying that the policies are no longer made at the county level,” Colbert responded that “*local policies* are still made at the county level,” and also carried out by the manager.⁵⁸

Humphrey and Colbert drew different conclusions from this exchange. For Colbert, the key point was that managers were not to make independent decisions about allotment assignments, initiate enforcement actions, approve loan applications or funds distributions, or determined what conservation practices would be followed locally. Therefore, they did not usurp county committeemen’s local policy prerogatives. But Humphrey drew a different lesson, one he found troubling. “So, in your view,” he posited to Colbert, “the office manager is an agent of the Secretary of Agriculture” and “not an agent of the county committee?” Colbert agreed that managers were agents of

⁵⁸ “Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees,” pp.280-281. (emphasis added)

the Secretary, but worked under the local direction of the committees. The managers represented the direct authority of the administrative staff of the USDA, as distinctly separate from the elected committee.⁵⁹

Humphrey and other opponents of the Benson reorganization balked at this centralization of farm program administration and policy making, through the direct intervention of the Secretary of Agriculture's agent. They asserted that farmers' voluntary compliance with regulations, and thus the effectiveness of all farm programs, depended on grassroots administration by qualified, experienced committeemen. Describing the leadership role of the committees, Norris Dodd, who rose through the Oregon committee system to eventually become an Undersecretary of Agriculture in the mid-1940s, described the committees as the "lifeguard of agriculture in this country" and argued passionately against term limits. He believed they would rob the committees of culminated expertise and of the trust farmers held in experienced and recognized local leaders. Drawing on his experience, Dodd envisaged that this loss would damage the effectiveness of farm programs and reduce voluntary compliance. "Many things that the committees were able to do could never have been accomplished otherwise," Dodd asserted, "because you had to have the confidence of your neighbors and of the farmers in that particular area in order to talk them into doing a thing that we

⁵⁹ "Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees," pp.280-281.

thought was important to do, but which might not be the best thing for the farmer from the standpoint of his pocketbook.” This was especially true, Dodd explained, during the war years when labor was short and farm produce was diverted to military uses. It remained a relevant concern in the post-war period when farmers had to comply with policies, such as reduced allotments, that might also be contrary to their individual interests.⁶⁰

Dodd’s testimony put forward the argument, advanced by the committees’ champions, that farmers were their own best regulators, and that furthermore, farm regulation was only practically possible and politically legitimate if conducted by the farmers themselves. In this framing, “the farmer elected committees” had become synonymous with “the farmers.” Everyone evoked the power of the grassroots. Proponents of the administrative status quo argued that the committees – elected by the farmers and unhindered by term limits and the unnecessary supervision of the managers – were the best example of grassroots policy development and administration in the United States. Benson, on the other hand, charged that the committees had lost their bearings and become dominated by self-interested career committeemen. In a speech to the National Farm Institute in Des Moines, Iowa, he declared his distaste for “ready-made” farm programs handed down from Washington. He instead declared

⁶⁰ Dodd statement, “Administration of Farm Programs by Farmer Committees,” p. 43.

that “programs should be built with the assistance of farmers and those who are working with them. Let’s build strong – from the ‘grass roots’ – the type of programs which farmers want – the kind that will not bring serious regrets and disappointments later.”⁶¹

Despite such rhetoric, Benson failed to successfully challenge the equivalency between the farmer elected committees and “the farmers,” and thus undermined his efforts at refashioning farm programs and their administrative structures. Instead, his strongest justifications rested on considerations of administrative efficiency, and any arguments that altering the committee system could create opportunities for previously unengaged farmers were weak and only timidly advanced. These arguments also referred only to the small community of farmers deemed to capable and acceptable leaders, but who may not have participated in the committees because of the entrenchment of long-time members. Benson made no overtures toward inclusion of the truly excluded: black farmers, women, other racial and ethnic minorities, and tenants and share croppers. That the reforms would result in some concentration of authority under the State Committees and office managers was undeniable, but Benson and the Eisenhower administration were utterly unsuccessful at persuading Congress and the farming public that this would prove beneficial for American farmers.

⁶¹ Associated Press, “Benson Calls for Farmers’ Help in Building Strong Farm Programs,” *Wilson Daily Times* (Wilson, N.C.), February 21, 1953.

Benson underestimated the power wielded by the committees within their communities and the extent to which locals, Democrats and Republicans alike, would fight to protect and exercise that power. The campaigning Eisenhower had been bold in his denunciation of the Washington agrocrats, but the Benson's reforms struck most directly entrenched committeemen. Congressional Democrats and committees supporters were highly successful at using the rhetoric of agrarian localism to recast the debate over the reorganization as one about grassroots democracy and the excesses of party politics. In so doing they avoided entirely engaging with critiques of the power of local elites, whom we might call the "little agrocrats."

Kennedy Era Reassessments

Benson spent his term as Secretary of Agriculture politically embattled and unpopular with American farmers – even Republican farmers. Immediately after taking office in 1960, the new Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman, appointed a study committee to look into the state of the farmer committees. Popular wisdom said that they had become aimless, without purpose, ineffective, and mired in partisan politics. Benson's rule changes were to blame. This was certainly the line emanating from the USDA's public relations offices during the Kennedy administration. In the 1962 USDA Annual report that declared that the Freeman-lead department had "restored" the

committees “to full authority.”⁶² One newspaper declared that the “farmer committee system is emerging from dormancy.”⁶³

E.Y. Floyd read this article with alarm. He had been the AAA administrator in North Carolina in the 1930s and during World War II, and feared that Freeman’s USDA would make good on this promise. Floyd wrote fellow North Carolinian and ASC chief administrator Horace Godfrey with his concerns. Floyd and Godfrey had been colleagues when Godfrey was the ASC administrator in North Carolina in the 1950s. Floyd’s letter to Godfrey asked him to be cautious in scaling back the job of the county managers and ramping back up the duties of the committeemen. Floyd acknowledged Godfrey’s long experience at the ASC, but cautioned, “This is one phase of the program you did not experience. You were serving in World War II at that time.” Floyd painted a bleak picture of the administrative process of the 1930s and 1940s when he had been in charge of the AAA in North Carolina. “I had experience, as you know, [with the program] from no committeemen, to a committee system, to a complete committee system which did not permit the Administrator’s Office to sign a letter of information to committees. An attempt was made that they would not be permitted to contact farmers

⁶² USDA, *After a Hundred Years: The Yearbook of Agriculture, 1962*, (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1962), 560. See also “Review of the Farmer Committee System: Report of the Study Committee,” Washington, D.C., November 28, 1962, p. 45, Box 3742, Folder “Committees 1,” RG 17, NARA.

⁶³ “Farmer Committee System Emerging from Dormancy,” *News and Observer* (Raleigh, N.C.), March 13, 1961, Box 2, Folder “Committees - State, January - April, 1961,” RG 145, NARA.

or give instructions to county workers.” Over this final (and likely exaggerated) indignity, Floyd resigned, though he believed that his replacement had mostly escaped these strictures in practice. By the time Godfrey entered the ASC, the manager system was in place, and Floyd found it the best way to manage the county offices. To scale back the managers’ duties would be a return to the bad old days, and he urged Godfrey to meet with him when next he traveled to Raleigh. “I just wanted you to think seriously about this thing and give some of us an opportunity to talk to you who have gone through a similar experience and it did not work.”⁶⁴

Floyd need not have worried. For all the anti-Benson rhetoric, the Kennedy-era USDA made surprisingly little change to his policies. The USDA launched a new study, whose purpose was to discover the causes of the purported malaise that had infected the farmer committee system. After interviewing hundreds of committeemen and office personnel across the country declared that “the farmer committee method of administering farm programs is sound.”⁶⁵ The study committee raised concerns about the system, but they were not focused on Benson’s rules. Rather, they closely echoed the criticisms that the Hoover Commission in 1948. The problem, as they saw it was this: “The Committee recognized that the Secretary of Agriculture is made responsible by the

⁶⁴ E.Y. Floyd to Horace Godfrey, March 13, 1961, Box 2, Folder “Committees - State, January - April, 1961,” RG 145, NARA.

⁶⁵ “Review of the Farmer Committee System: Report of the Study Committee,” Washington, D.C., November 28, 1962, p.5, Box 3742, Folder “Committees 1,” RG 17, NARA.

Congress for the administration of federally authorized farm programs. The elected farmer committees are not directly answerable to the Secretary. How to achieve efficient program operation with the double thrust of local democratic action and the clear delineation of the Secretary's granted authority and administrative obligation to control was the major problem before the committee."⁶⁶ They worried not that the committees had lost their way, but that they were still too independent and too difficult for the Secretary of Agriculture to control. Seeking a solution to this problem, the same problem bemoaned by Benson, and the Hoover Commission before him, the study committee seriously considered dismantling the farmer committees or scaling them back to much more narrowly defined duties.⁶⁷ In the end, they discarded both possibilities, and recommended keeping the committees in place with only the most minor adjustments to election and work rules, and suggested bringing the office managers into the civil service, making further solidifying their positions of administrative authority in the counties.⁶⁸

One key development did emerge from the Freeman-era reassessment of the Committee system. In a move that sparked some controversy, the USDA proposed to

⁶⁶ "Review of the Farmer Committee System: Report of the Study Committee," Washington, D.C., November 28, 1962, p. 5, Box 3742, Folder "Committees 1," RG 17, NARA.

⁶⁷ "Review of the Farmer Committee System: Report of the Study Committee," Washington, D.C., November 28, 1962, p. 7, Box 3742, Folder "Committees 1," RG 17, NARA.

⁶⁸ "Review of the Farmer Committee System: Report of the Study Committee," Washington, D.C., November 28, 1962, p. 7-9, Box 3742, Folder "Committees 1," RG 17, NARA.

alter the oath of office that committeemen signed to require their personal support for ASC programs, as written. The oath of office in use throughout the 1950s obligated committeemen to fulfill the duties of the office to the best of their ability and to take responsibility for any loss or harm to the Department stemming from fraud or negligence the part of the committeeman.⁶⁹ The Freeman study committee had discovered committeemen whose personally disagreed with the goals and mechanisms of the ASC, and recommended that the USDA take steps to address the problem. "The Committee found only a small fraction of committeemen publicly opposed to the objectives of the farm programs authorized by law." Nevertheless, "Committeemen . . . should be expected to give loyal support to honest and efficient administration of programs authorizes by law. If a committeeman finds himself in a fundamental disagreement with the farm programs and administrative approach to farm problems, and if he engages in public criticism, then he should resign from the committee and refuse to serve if renominated."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ John. P. Duncan to William M. Tuck, n.d. [ca. June 1963], Box 3923, "Committees 1, Community-County-State, May 21 to Aug 7 [1963]," RG 16, NARA.

⁷⁰ "Review of the Farmer Committee System: Report of the Study Committee," Washington, D.C., November 28, 1962, p. 7, Box 3742, Folder "Committees 1," RG 187 NARA.

In response the USDA proposed an addition to the oath, affirming that the committeeman would “support the program he is called upon to administer.”⁷¹ The Virginia Farm Bureau derided this as an “oath of allegiance.”⁷² Virginia congressman William Tuck chided Freeman, “As one who believes that our American system of government is dependent upon the people, I cannot conceive why this is to be done. The committeemen are elected, it is my understanding, to represent the farmers in their dealings with your department, whereas the provision cited would ignore the wishes of the people and make them conform to the overall control of the department.”⁷³ North Carolina senator C. Everett Jordan expressed similar worries. “I am concerned about a pledge that would prevent a committeeman from stating his views about any program or law which may be in effect at the time he is elected by his fellow farmers to serve as their representative . . .”⁷⁴ The Department quickly abandoned the proposal.⁷⁵ This ill-considered proposition demonstrated the Departments’ concern about the independence, and potential unruliness, of the county committees. Unable to do away

⁷¹ John. P. Duncan to William M. Tuck, n.d. [ca. June 1963], Box 3923, “Committees 1, Community-County-State, May 21 to Aug 7 [1963],” RG 16, NARA; “Review of the Farm Committee System: Report of the Study Committee,” November 28, 1962, (Washington, D.C.), p

⁷² Robert Delano to William M. Tuck, June 17, 1963, Box 3923, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, May 21 to Aug 7 [1963],” RG 16, NARA.

⁷³ William M. Tuck to Orville Freeman, June 19, 1963, Box 3923, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, May 21 to Aug 7 [1963],” RG 16, NARA.

⁷⁴ C. Everette Jordan to Orville Freeman, June 6, 1963, Box 3923, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, May 21 to Aug 7 [1963],” RG 16, NARA.

⁷⁵ John P. Duncan to William Tuck, June 27, 1963, Box 3923, Folder “Committees 1, Community-County-State, May 21 to Aug 7 [1963],” RG 16, NARA.

with the committee system, the USDA proposed other ways to assert the Secretary's authority.

The reasons Freeman's USDA did not attempt to dismantle the committee system were so were not as lofty as the rhetoric of economic democracy that animated proponents of the committee system in the 1930s, or the claims that American democracy in the Cold War era required strong, locally-rooted and democratically administered intuitions that characterized the debates of the 1950s. Charles Brannan, the Secretary of Agriculture under Truman who had once declared that the Hoover Commission's conclusions about the committee system were entirely wrongheaded, had changed his tune in the intervening years. As a member of Freeman's study committee, he questioned if the democratic justifications for the committee system had ever made sense. "The student of this unique administrative instrumentality will recognize the desirable democratic characteristics inherent in the farmer elected committees. But he may also properly ask if such affirmative advantages balance out the obvious disadvantages. The democratically elected Congress, usually after another very laborious democratic process, adopts the programs."⁷⁶ Instead, political expediency proved most important. "Over many years, the farmer committee system has become

⁷⁶ "Review of the Farmer Committee System: Report of the Study Committee," Washington, D.C., November 28, 1962, p. 46-A, Box 3742, Folder "Committees 1," RG17, NARA.

deeply imbedded in American agriculture. The study committee found no alternative system of administration of farm programs which has the support of farmers.”⁷⁷

Conclusion

The administrative politics of the successor agencies of the AAA, the Production and Marketing and Administration and the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation service, sheds light on the problems associated with regulatory governance and the democratic process. There are significant advantages to such a system, but also important conflicts of interest and losses of program efficiency and efficacy. Democratized administration of farm regulatory programs provides a mechanism for using local knowledge and networks that might otherwise be inaccessible to administrators more removed from farm communities. County committees were able to apply federal farm regulations to their communities in a manner that best fit local circumstances. They chose conservation measures that suited local soil and weather conditions. Local committeemen were on the ground and able to respond to individual disputes and to problems affecting everyone in their community, such as weather-related disasters, that required flexibility and discretion in applying the

⁷⁷ “Review of the Farmer Committee System: Report of the Study Committee,” Washington, D.C., November 28, 1962, p. 9, 11 (quote on 9), Box 3742, Folder “Committees 1,” RG 17, NARA.

rules to particular circumstances. Local committees could also investigate accusations of fraud or other wrong-doing efficiently and with knowledge of the actors involved and the context of the dispute.

Additionally, locally driven and participatory administration of farm programs created dynamic relationships between farmers and the agency. Many farmers participated in the program as more than clients or beneficiaries of entitlements. They became stake holders in the system as a whole, with an interest not only in how farm programs benefited or restricted their own individual farming operations, but in the strength of the entire program. When Charles Brannan conceded that the committee system was the only politically viable system for regulating American farmer, he was not referring to the fraught relationship between the ASC and Congress. Brannan believed that farmers themselves would not submit to such oversight unless they themselves directed the implementation of farm programs.

This method of program implementation also suffered from corresponding draw-backs. So much local discretion could, successive USDA administrations claimed, lead to inconsistency in application. This was a question of fairness across multiple farms and dispersed locales. It was also a question of overall program effectiveness. The USDA provided parameters within which local offices

worked, but officials at the USDA worried that thousands of local adjustments could throw the entire program off course.

There were also questions about the use of power and its concentration among only a few farmers in each community. When the decisions of local and state committees had significant effects on an individual families' livelihoods, the consequences of corruption or the misuse of authority could be serious. The uncertainties surrounding the case of the Hardin family of South Carolina demonstrate this problem well. If they had indeed rented as pastureland a tract that was involved in a soil conservation contract, then they did willfully attempt to circumvent the rules and accepted conservation payments from the government under false pretenses. When their actions came to light, they were aided by two local committeemen who conducted the initial investigation and cleared the Hardins of wrong-doing. If the grazing was truly accidental, as the Hardins maintained, they were victims of the county chairman's dislike. The chairman, in turn, used the State Committee to carry out a personal agenda. Neither scenario was an example of good governance. Both provide arguments against farmer-administered regulation of their own industry. Greater control over implementation by a more centralized authority could mitigate conflicts or abuses of this type. But Benson's own rules had not prevented the Hardin's quandary. Managers alone – as Freeman's committee observed – were not strong enough to fully supervise,

let alone usurp, the committee's work. Committees acting on their own prerogatives seemed the nature of the beast for this kind of administration.

The USDA's largest and most politically influential department was strongly rooted in local communities, even in local party politics. Few institutions of the federal government had the extensive reach into so many individual's lives, unmediated by state governments, that the PMA and ASC enjoyed. Even the Extension Service depended in part on state and county governments for funding, facilities, and personnel approval. As a result even the centralizers like Benson, who did not celebrate the New Deal's economic democracy, understood that abolishing the committee system was practically impossible if American farmers were to accept the ASC's authority. But defenders of the system in Washington overstated the ASC's committees' claim to truly grassroots action. They were, unmistakably, federal instrumentalities, not organic and purely local institutions. Their investment in the idea of the farmer committees prevented them from engaging with the committee system's problems as an exercise of democracy or as tools for administration. In North Carolina, administrators closer to the ground struggled with the political and administrative challenges of the 1950s and devised their own solutions.

Chapter 4: “The Challenge”

The Cooperative Agricultural Extension Service was the hub of the federal farm agency wheel in rural American. This educational agency with roots in the Progressive Era had an institutional presence in every farm county in the country. We have seen how Extension service personnel and offices provided the necessary structure and administrative support to implement the Agricultural Adjustment Act in early days of the New Deal. Even as the AAA and other federal farm agencies like the Farmers Home Administration developed their own administrative structures, they continued to rely on the Extension Service’s network of personnel and its relationships within the farm community in order to successfully conduct their work.

Beyond administrative logistics, the Extension approach to agricultural work informed the underlying assumptions on which other federal farm agencies based their policies and implementation. The thoroughness with which the Extension service was integrated into the work of all local level federal farm agencies provided some Extension personnel with a unique and compelling opportunity for leadership among the federal farm agencies in their state. This was particularly true in North Carolina in the 1950s, where the state Extension director engaged in an expansive and successful project of bureaucratic entrepreneurialism that coordinated the various farm agencies in the state

to pursue progressive, commercial farming as the primary mode of agricultural production.

David Weaver led the North Carolina Extension service from 1950 to 1962. He excelled as an administrator and leader among other farm agency officials. He imbued the implementation of farm programs in the state with his brand of progressive farming philosophy that made North Carolina a model for farm program implementation nationwide. He organized and streamlined federal program implementation in the state, helping agency leadership and local personnel to understand each other's job and to work together toward common goals. During Weaver's tenure as State Director of the Extension Service he identified and addressed the challenges to developing and implementing farm programs in the United States where policies and administrative structures were fractured and decentralized. Weaver's success achieving coordination in North Carolina demonstrated the impact of bureaucratic entrepreneurship in such a disjointed policy context.

Weaver's accomplishments stemmed from his institutional position and his personal and professional networks. As the Director of the North Carolina Extension Service, he exercised considerable influence over the direction of farm programs in the state. Although the Extension Service's personnel and projects were ubiquitous in rural North Carolina, the agency had no rule-making or enforcement authority. Weaver understood that the Extension Service was vital to the functions of all other federal farm

agencies at the local level. Weaver leveraged Extension resources and his own extensive network among farm agency workers, forged as a teacher and long-time Extension worker to facilitate communication among disconnected officials. He was the driving force behind the North Carolina Board of Farm Agencies and Organizations, a group of farm leaders, agency directors, and state government officials to cooperate in defining and implementing share policy goals.

Weaver's vision for commercial agriculture and rural development was limited as was his realm of entrepreneurial action. He did not seek to reimagine federal farm policies in order to create programs that were better suited to the needs of small or struggling famers. Instead, his goal was to make existing programs work more efficiently toward their existing goals, to speed their efforts toward creating a strong, concentrated commercial agriculture sector in North Carolina. Weaver and his colleagues hoped to spark an Extension-centered social movement that would entice small and part-time farmers into the progressive farming fold. While successful in better-organizing the administrative and political efforts of the various farm programs in North Carolina, Weaver's initiatives did not help the Extension Service or any other farm agency to aid farmers and farm workers who did not make the transition into full-time commercial farming.

Centrality of Extension

The North Carolina Extension Service changed leadership in 1950. Retiring director, I.O. Schaub, had steered the course of the Extension Service and the NC State College School of Agriculture for over twenty five years. He took office as Director of Extension in 1924, and during that time had also served as Dean of the School of Agriculture, and Director of Research. Schaub was well respected within the national Extension Service and the general farm organizations, and he was a frequent advisor to North Carolina's congressional delegation on questions of farm legislation.¹ Schaub was a North Carolina institution unto himself, and even after leaving office, he remained vocal about questions of farm policy and economics, a living source of reference for politicians, scholars, and Extension officials.²

David Weaver, Schaub's successor, was a native of Ohio, but he spent his entire career in North Carolina. After serving as a World War I infantryman and graduating from Ohio State, he moved to North Carolina in 1923 to pursue a master's degree at NC State. Weaver became North Carolina's first Extension worker in the field of agricultural engineering, and the chair of the college's Department of Agricultural

¹ Schaub carried on a regular correspondence with Congressman Harold Cooley. The NC 4th District representative from Nashville, North Carolina, was a fixture on the House Agriculture committee, which he chaired for eighteen years between 1949 and 1967. Cooley regularly consulted Schaub on questions of policy, and frequently referred constituent letters to Schaub or comment.

² See for example heavy between 1948 and 1950 of Schaub and Harold Cooley, Box 6, File "C 1948-1950," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

Engineering. Weaver became the assistant state director of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service in 1948, and succeeded Schaub as director in 1950.³



Figure 7: David Weaver, Center, Receiving the Distinguished Service to Agriculture Award, Presented by A.C. Edwards, Executive Vice President of the North Carolina Farm Bureau, Mrs. Weaver at right. ⁴

Reflecting his training as an engineer, Weaver believed in the benefit of agricultural modernization and industrialization. He believed modernized agriculture was necessary for the economic development of North Carolina, and the United States in general. A devout Presbyterian with a conservative worldview, he frequently used his speeches to relate a tale of mankind's march of progress from the time when nomadic

³ "David Stathem Weaver, June 19, 1896 – November 12, 1966," North Carolina Agricultural Hall of Fame Inductees, NCDA&CS Public Affairs Division, < <http://www.ncagr.gov/paffairs/aghall/weaver.htm> > (July 2, 2012).

⁴ "David S. Weaver, Agricultural Extension Service Director," 1958, Item number 000735, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina. Used with permission.

tribes first settled into agriculturally based-villages, advancing inevitability to the modernist vision of industrialized agriculture advocated by Extension in the 1950s.⁵ In the Jeffersonian tradition, he linked the strength of the American farm sector to the strength of American democracy and he believed that a healthy American farm sector was of crucial importance in the Cold War context. Weaver theorized that surplus agricultural production in the United States could be used to promote peace and democracy abroad. "One of the ways in which we can win people to our democratic way of life to is to show that this way of life has produced more for everyone than any other system developed by mankind in its centuries of history."⁶ He suggested that trading agricultural commodities for other strategic resources and sharing surplus commodities as part of a program of humanitarian aid would help accomplish this task.⁷

Weaver espoused the Extension orthodoxy of the 1950s, that of the positive power of education, mechanization, and commercial agriculture to shape farming operations and improving rural social life. He strongly believed in the unique position farmers occupied in American society as individual economic and social actors and as a

⁵ David S. Weaver, "Agricultural Prosperity Depends on the Development of Local Leadership," Box 3, Folder 1, Professional Speeches 1952-1956," David Stathe Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, NCSU.

⁶ David Weaver to Ann Prichard, Jan 19, 1956, Box 14, Folder "P, 1948-1959," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁷ David Weaver to Ann Prichard, Jan 19, 1956, Box 14, Folder "P, 1948-1959," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

meritorious interest group. In 1952, Weaver made the case for federal support for agriculture, and for farmers as a deserving special interest group, in an address to the Carteret County Farm Bureau annual meeting. On a local radio broadcast, the county Extension agent summarized Weaver's remarks. According to the agent, Weaver had explained that "Agriculture was the first group to apply what is referred to as the pressure system in Congress to obtain favorable laws. Since we are in the minority group today, we must meet, plan our own programs on a County, State, and National basis. We must, through united effort fight hard to get laws passed to protect our interest, in order that our small segment might obtain our rightful share of the national income."⁸ Weaver believed that farmers had to work together in order to achieve any advantage in the market place, having "passed the benefits of advancing technology on to his customers."⁹ The answer, Weaver believed was parity-based farm supports and a well-organized farm sector. "No longer can the individual farm family make very much progress by itself – it must learn to work with other farm families for the benefit of the group. Group action always requires leadership, and it is to leadership that we must

⁸R. M. Williams, "Radio Broadcast – R. M. Williams, County Farm Agent, Tuesday, Nov. 11, 1952," Box 8, Folder "Co. Agents, 1952," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁹David S. Weaver, "Agricultural Prosperity Depends on the Development of Local Leadership," Box 3, Folder "1, Professional Speeches 1952-1956," David Stathem Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, NCSU.

look for agricultural prosperity.”¹⁰ That leadership should come from within the farm community, and also from within the Extension Service itself.¹¹

Weaver directed an agency with a large local footprint and a multiplicity of duties. In addition to the research, education, and demonstration functions that formed the heart of its mission, the Extension service worked closely with all other federal and state farm agencies in the county and state level. The county agents in the south served as *ex officio* members of the PMA/ASC committees, and Extension officials worked closely with the committees and office staff to publicize upcoming committee elections and policy referenda and encourage voter turnout.¹² The Soil Conservation Service worked with the PMA/ASC to implement conservation measures through their programs and with the Extension Service to demonstrate their methods and instruct farmers in conducting them. All of these federal entities had some local presence in farm counties. Add to this mix the state departments of agriculture and the land grant colleges, as well as federal grading and inspection services and research stations, and

¹⁰ David S. Weaver, “Agricultural Prosperity Depends on the Development of Local Leadership,” Box 3, Folder “1, Professional Speeches 1952-1956,” David Stathem Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, NCSU.

¹¹ David S. Weaver, “Agricultural Prosperity Depends on the Development of Local Leadership,” Box 3, Folder “1, Professional Speeches 1952-1956,” David Stathem Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, NCSU.

¹² M.L. Wilson to David Weaver, June 26, 1952, Box 19, Folder “Wilson, M.L., 1948-1952,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU; “The Wheat Referendum . . .,” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, July, 1953), Box 8, Folder “Co. Agents, 1953,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU; David S. Weaver to All County Agents, July 23, 1953, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

farm agency workers were thick on the ground in rural America. All of these entities relied upon Extension Service knowledge or resources in some way.

This central position among farm agencies provided the Extension Service, and its leaders, with a greater degree of power over farm program implementation than the ostensibly educative organization had been designed to possess – more, even, than the Extension Service claimed for itself when describing its functions to outsiders. The agency became a *de facto* regulator. The Extension Service set no rules and had no enforcement powers, but county and home demonstration agents were the eyes and ears of other federal agencies on the ground. We have already seen how Extension agents helped with voter turnout and education. In addition, agents' judgments about an individual farmers' commitment to progressive farming carried weight with the PMA/ASC when assigning allotments and quotas, and with the FHA, which deployed Extension agents to observe supervised credit customers. Figure 8 is an organizational chart from the early 1940s, demonstrating only the organizational structure of the Agricultural Adjustment program. It illustrates the centrality of the Extension service's work to the AAA, including the advisory and administrative work provided by the state Extension office and the local duties of the County Agent, along with the various committees and Extension and Agricultural Adjustment commodity specialists.

Organizational charts of other local programs with local offices would show similar linkages.

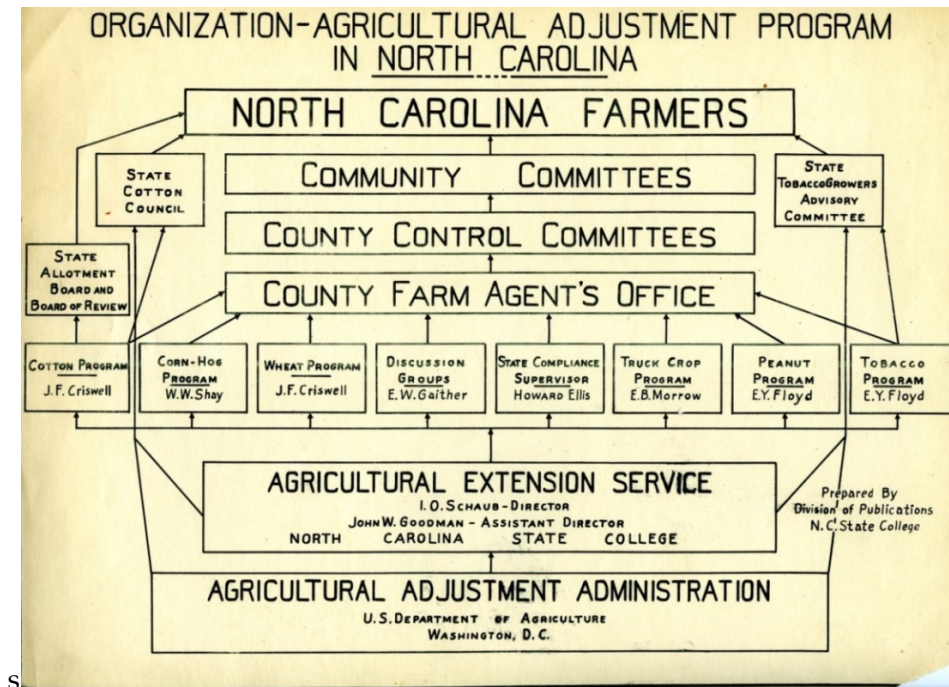


Figure 8: Organization of Agricultural Adjustment in North Carolina circa. 1940s¹²

he cooperation between the FHA and the Extension service serves as a telling example of the FHA's informal regulatory power and the degree to which other farm agencies relied upon the Extension Service to aid in policy development and to complete FHA work on the ground. In 1949, the State Director of the North Carolina FHA, J.B.

¹ "Organization – Agricultural Adjustment Program in North Carolina," n.d. Box 1, Folder 10, UA102.005, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina. Used with permission.

Slack, reached out to I.O. Schaub, requesting the Extension expertise on FHA policy matters. Slack wished to know if Extension officials concurred with the long-range income projections that the FHA used when considering loan applications. They relied on estimates of future commodity prices and sought Extension assurances that the forecasts they were using were “reasonable.” Second, Slack wanted advice from Schaub on how the FHA could better serve low-income farmers in North Carolina. Third, and with great emphasis, Slack wanted suggestions for how to improve cooperation among all federal agencies in the state. He requested that the Extension Service “point out to us any instances of lack of cooperation and coordination of the representatives of this Agency with other agricultural agencies, and suggestions as to how better coordination and cooperation can be brought about between this and other agricultural agencies in this State.” Slack especially wished to improve relationships between FHA and Extension personnel.³

Good relationships between local Extension and FHA officials were essential to the FHA. The agency had a county committee system similar to that of the PMA/ASC, but in the 1950s it still lacked an extensive staff of administrative personnel. This made it difficult for the FHA to practice supervised credit. The agency monitored the activities of borrowers to ensure that they managed their farms and homes in a manner likely to

³ J. B. Slack to I.O. Schaub, February 3, 1949, Box 10, Folder “Farmers Home Administration,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

enable them to repay their loans. FHA relied on Extension Agents to educate these borrowers on progressive farming and scientific homemaking and to keep the FHA informed of their progress. "In order to render more and better service to farm families who are using the loan facilities of the Farmers Home Administration," a 1954 document circulated among North Carolina's Extension and Home Demonstration agents informed agents, "it has been mutually agreed that the Farmers Home Administration and Federal Extension Service will work closely together for the purpose of rendering maximum assistance to such families in producing and conserving food . . . , protecting their health, improving their homes, educating their children, and participating in community activities."⁴

Officials laid out three specific goals for the cooperation between FHA and the Extension Service. The first was that FHA families would have access to all Extension programs. Women were the particular targets of this policy, for the agreement stressed that "special effort will be made to see that the homemakers of Farmers Home Administration Borrowers participate fully in homemakers' clubs and other Extension activities." The second objective was to intervene in many aspects of home making and child-rearing. Extension service officials were to "work closely with officials of the

⁴ David S. Weaver to All County Farm and Home Agents, "Joint Statement of Policy Between Federal Extension Service and Farmers Home Administration," March 10, 1954, Box 6, Folder "Circular Letters, Jan-June, 1954," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

Farmers Home Administration in family living matters, such as protecting and improving health conditions, production and conservation of food, family living budgets, home improvement, child care and other related matters.” Finally, Extension officials and the FHA would work together to assist struggling families within the bounds of these agencies’ locally available resources.⁵ David Weaver found nothing extraordinary in these instructions, for he assured his county agents that “I believe we are already working together on a fine basis in North Carolina, and trust that we will continue to do so.”⁶

In practical terms, all of this cooperation between agencies could bring difficulties as well as advantages, especially when offices competed for scarce resources. Joint meetings of various farm agencies required intricate determinations of which personnel could attend, how they would be compensated and by whom, whose car they would drive, and who would pay for meals. Discussions about the use and abuse of local agency franking privileges in disseminating information and conducting shared business filled reams of correspondence. County offices jealously guarded their resources and their policy making territory, even if they were glad for assistance in

⁵ David S. Weaver to All County Farm and Home Agents, “Joint Statement of Policy Between Federal Extension Service and Farmers Home Administration,” March 10, 1954, Box 6, Folder “Circular Letters, Jan-June, 1954,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁶ David S. Weaver to All County Farm and Home Agents, “Joint Statement of Policy Between Federal Extension Service and Farmers Home Administration,” March 10, 1954, Box 6, Folder “Circular Letters, Jan-June, 1954,” NCSU University.

implementation. They could not conduct their work without mutual support. Each agency relied on the others' information, personnel, and relationships to accomplish its individual duties.⁷ David Weaver believed that this cooperation was poorly managed, and that farm agencies were too competitive, and understood each other's work too little, for effective implementation of the farm program as a unified whole. He wrote to Undersecretary of Agriculture, True Morse, that "the farmer is not particularly interested in which agency serves him, but he is distinctly interested in being adequately served. There is too much work for all of us to do to be wasting time arguing who is to do it or who is to get credit for it."⁸

Inter-agency discord could arise from misinformation as much as competition. A May, 1950, meeting of personnel of the P.M.A., Soil Conservation Service, and the Forestry Service was the scene of one such incident. In the context of a discussion about "a long-rang agricultural program," someone repeated incorrect information that the Haywood County, North Carolina, Extension office did not have community development program, unlike many of its neighbors. Haywood's representative at this

⁷ "Some Facts about Cotton for 1954," Box 6, Folder "Circular Letters, July 1- Dec. 31, 1953," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU; David S. Weaver to All County Agents, November 25, 1953, "Circular Letters, July 1- Dec. 31, 1953," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU; "Loans for Soil and Water Conservation," Box 8, Folder "Co. Agents, 1954," "Circular Letters, July 1- Dec. 31, 1953," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁸ David S. Weaver to True Morse, April 24, 1957, Box 2975, Folder "General Correspondence, 1906-76, Meetings 4-4 Under Secretary June 1-June 31, 1957," RG 16, NARA.

meeting vehemently corrected this information, and reported the discussion to the Extension officials of Haywood County. They reacted with alarm. The County Agent and Home Demonstration agent co-authored a letter to the official believed to be the source of the bad information, and sent copies to I.O. Schaub. They employed a tone unusually emphatic for Extension correspondence. "Here is the point we would like to get across: It seems to us it is hard enough for Extension workers to keep their own program going, without having other agencies coming in to tell us that we don't have a good program underway." They requested that the official correct his statement with any representatives of other agencies to whom he might have spoken. "We would appreciate this very much, for it is a little embarrassing when people from Raleigh come up and say that they have been informed that we don't even have an agricultural program, with the idea in mind of helping us set up one." They ended the letter with a polite invitation and subtle reminder to be better informed about local Extension programs before discussing them. "Come to see us some time."⁹

This was exactly the kind of conflict that Weaver believed was undermining the success of federal farm programs in North Carolina. "It seems to me that some of the confusion and lack of coordination on the part of the many agricultural agencies was somewhat understandable in the early days following the formation of these agencies. It

⁹ W.A. Corpening and Mary Cromwell to F.S. Sloan, May 15, 1950, Box 6, Folder "C, 1948-1950," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

is indeed gratifying to know, however, that in the majority of these cases and places, the intervening years have seen the removal of a lot of this confusion. There are a few spots, however, particularly where personal wrongs were involved to the extent that it seemed impossible to ‘forgive and forget’[,] that further coordination and cooperation is necessary.”¹⁰ Weaver consistently sought to address the disjointed nature of the farm agencies and what he felt was a misplaced sense of competition or territoriality between them. In his view, while individual agencies had different realms of responsibility emanating from Washington and from state capitals, on the local level, only coordinated action could achieve the goals of modern, progressive agriculture he and other like-minded policy makers hoped to achieve. This lack of cross-agency coordination provided an opportunity for organizational innovation.

Entrepreneurial Solutions

Bureaucratic entrepreneurship is a skill and a practice of innovative administrators in autonomous public agencies whose work expands the duties and authority of a department by developing with new programs or experimenting with new ways to implement, expand, or organize existing programs. These innovations arise when individual bureaucrats’ respond to a public need or an internal

¹⁰ David Weaver to Clarence Poe, November 3, 1950, Box 14, Folder “P, 1948-1959,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

administrative challenge. Bureaucratic entrepreneurs often hail from the “middle management” of government institutions. They are the department and bureau heads with long careers in their agency, who possess both the knowledge and the reputation to effect changes in their institution, even (or especially) when those changes are not necessarily the preference of their superiors at the upper level of an agency or of Congress. Successful bureaucratic entrepreneurs are most often found in autonomous agencies and departments, and who can tap extensive and varied networks in order to build political support for their innovations.¹¹

Bureaucratic entrepreneurship thrived in the Progressive Era in the United States, especially in the USDA.¹² In the USDA’s Bureau of Chemistry, chief chemist Harvey Wiley was a crusader against the adulteration of food and drugs, and his efforts were instrumental in the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. This act expanded the authority of the Bureau of Chemistry to test and verify the safety and accuracy of product labels. The contemporaneous leaders of the Plant Science and Forestry Service branches of the USDA were also successful bureaucratic entrepreneurs.

¹¹ Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 30. Carpenter defines bureaucratic entrepreneurship as “the process by which agency leaders experiment with new programs and introduce innovations to existing programs and gradually convinced diverse coalitions or organized interest, the media, and politicians of the value of their ideas and their bureaus.” The process consists of incremental program development and the building of “network-based” coalitions.

¹² Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy*; Clayton Coppin, “James Wilson and Harvey Wiley: The Dilemma of Bureaucratic Entrepreneurship,” *Agricultural History*, 64:2 (Spring 1990): 167-181.

The Extension Service was itself a product of this kind of innovation. Seaman Knapp began to stage public demonstrations in order to instruct farmers on the methods and technological advances emanating from land grant colleges and experiment stations. The demonstration method championed by Knapp prevailed over competing alternatives, and garnered the support of Southern farm interests in particular, to become the model for USDA farmer education. The first USDA county agents were appointed in 1906, and these agents established Boys' Corn Clubs and Girls' Tomato Clubs, forerunners of 4-H, that taught scientific farming and home making skills to farm children. The 1914 Smith-Lever Act formalized this system and provided funds and an organizational structure for the newly-created Cooperative Agricultural Extension Service.¹³

The USDA emerged from the New Deal and Second World War as a complex and extensive regulatory agency for American agriculture, but with an almost incomprehensible internal structure, shaped by political compromises that at translated poorly into institutional logics. The programs that survived the political turmoil and wartime repurposing emerged into the post-war world with similar commitment to progressive commercial farming and economic liberalism in the agricultural economy. Their implementing structures were in chaos, dependent on each other's resources but

¹³ Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy*, 242-251.

largely unknown to each other in the details of their work. Congress and the Truman administration battled over the long-term direction that federal farm programs would take, those who implemented existing programs faced persistent administrative problems. This situation called for a different kind of bureaucratic entrepreneurship than that which revolutionized the USDA in the Progressive Era.

Scholars of public administration observe two kinds of bureaucratic entrepreneurship, “heroic” or “individual” entrepreneurship and “systemic” entrepreneurship. Individual bureaucratic entrepreneurs, such as Wiley, emerge most often in new organizations or when established institutions take on new duties or new activities. These individuals may seek to increase the power of the organization vis-à-vis other established public institutions, and related functions already established with the organization are relatively low in complexity. Systemic entrepreneurship emerges from a different institutional context. These organizations are well-established and mature, and their functions are often very complex. Rather than forming entirely new organizational structures, as Knapp did in forming the Extension Service, systemic entrepreneurs seek to change the way existing organizations function, pursuing “incremental, process-based innovations.” In such cases, the entrepreneur must have sufficient “influence and credibility,” within the organization and with outside official in

order be trusted to follow his or her entrepreneurial instincts and to bring colleagues on board.¹⁴

The latter conditions described the USDA of the early 1950s well, and David Weaver was a skillful systemic bureaucratic entrepreneur. North Carolina had nearly the smallest average farm size in the South in 1950. Weaver blamed North Carolina's failure to develop a strong and concentrated commercial farming sector on disorganized and poorly coordinated program implementation across the many farm agencies that operated in the state. Dedicated to addressing this problem, Weaver spearheaded the founding of the North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies (NCBFOA). The impetus for forming the NCBFOA seems to have emerged from a special gathering of state farm agency leaders in early 1951. The meeting took place at the urging from Secretary of Agriculture Charles Brannan in order to evaluate the degree and quality of cooperation among federal farm agencies in the individual states. Weaver believed this to be "the first time that the supervisors of all agencies have gotten together in one meeting for a discussion of mutual problems" in North Carolina.¹⁵ Weaver and other meeting goers saw potential value in continuing their dialog. The supervisors

¹⁴ Luc Bernier and Taïeb Hafsi, "The Changing Nature of Public Entrepreneurship," *Public Administration Review*, 67:3 (May-Jun. 2007): 495-497.

¹⁵ David Weaver to M.L. Wilson, March 19, 1951, folder Wilson, M.L., Box 19, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

adjourned the meeting with a plan to convene again, holding gatherings across the state and to assess the cooperation of agencies at the county level.¹⁶

State-level administrators of the federal agencies, representatives from the NC Department of Agriculture, and the state leaders of the general farm organizations soon formed the NCBFOA to coordinate these efforts. Their mission was to promote a greater awareness and understanding of state and federal farm programs by rural people. "To this end," the charter declared, "the Board will use its efforts to coordinate the work of all agricultural agencies and farm organizations to make the overall farm program in the State as complete [and] effective as possible."¹⁷ Further, Weaver explained to M.L. Wilson, then the national Director of Extension, that the Board's flagship program aimed to increase farm incomes and the security of North Carolina's farmers, improve educational opportunities, promote "finer spiritual values" and stronger community life, and promote the "dignity and contentment of rural living."¹⁸

¹⁶ David Weaver to M.L. Wilson, March 19, 1951, folder Wilson, M.L., Box 19, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

¹⁷ North Carolina Board of Farm Agencies and Organizations, "Charter," Box 14, Binder "Minutes of the Meeting [sic] of the North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies, 1956-1959," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU. The board consisted of the heads of : NC Farm Bureau, State Grange, NC Experiment Station, NC Extension Service, Vocational Agriculture, SCS, PMA, NCDA, Department of Conservation and Development, FHA, REA

¹⁸ David S. Weaver, "The Challenge – Teamwork Approach to Agricultural Problems in North Carolina," p. 1, Box 1, Folder 6 "Professional Speeches 1952-1956," David Stathem Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, NCSU.

Weaver's influence contributed significantly to the NCBOFA's embrace of an ambitious agenda. To M.L. Wilson, he explained that his network of connections throughout all farm agencies in the state allowed him to advocate strongly for the development of the NCBFOA and to achieve the buy-in from district and county level officials necessary to implement his vision. His connections stemmed from his own education at NC State College and from his years as a faculty member and Extension official. "From the comments which I have had from our own agents and from the county representatives of other agencies with whom I have had a long continued friendship, starting with their student days here, has indicated a very healthy attitude" toward the Board's work. Weaver expressed his pride in having taught "the majority of the county agents, assistants, vocational agriculture teachers and technical workers in several other agencies." These relationships had "been of great assistance in establishing confidence in our work here."¹⁹ Furthermore, Weaver avoided taking part in the political turmoil that characterized the USDA throughout the 1950s. He expressed his agreement with the parity principle, but avoided taking sides on the percent of parity

¹⁹ David Weaver to M.L. Wilson, March 19, 1951, Folder "Wilson, M.L.," Box 19, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU. Weaver claims to have "taken the lead here in North Carolina in attempting to weld the work of the agricultural agencies into one united program for the benefit of the farmer," an obvious reference to The Challenge and the NCBFOA in 1957 letter to True Morse: David S. Weaver to True Morse, April 24, 1957, Box 2975, Folder "General Correspondence, 1906-76, Meetings 4-4 Under Secretary June 1-June 31, 1957," RG 16, NARA.

question and does not seem to have made any official statement about the reorganization of the PMA.²⁰

David Weaver combined the ideology of an Extension true believer, the resources of a skilled and well-connected bureaucrat, and the political un-impeachability necessary to lead North Carolina's farm agency personnel – from all government organization, state and federal – in a coordinated effort to implement a broad policy vision for agricultural modernization in the state. His official position in the NCBFOA in the 1950s demonstrates his influence. During the 1950s, he declined to serve as chair, but he found himself the “perennial choice” for the post of vice-chair, providing consistent direction from near the top of the organization, while others rotated in and out of the chairmanship.²¹ The strength of Weaver's personality, his reputation, and his consistent leadership would keep the Board active throughout the 1950s.²²

The efforts of the Board point to the difficulties administering multiple farm programs. Weaver believed that federal farm programs were most effective when

²⁰ I have not found anything in the archive to indicate Weaver's party affiliation. Weaver appears to have been very serious about keeping his political opinions (in regard to party politics) entirely private.

²¹ David Weaver to R. W. Shoffner and C.B. Ratchford, 1-14-1957, p. 2, Box 19, Folder D. S. Weaver, 1956-1958, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU; David S. Weaver to Horace D. Godfrey, March 7, 1957, Box 19, Folder “D.S. Weaver 1956-1958,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU. Weaver's primary reason for declining to serve as chair was that he believed it conflicted with his duties as Extension Director to implement the Challenge Program, discussed below.

²² The Board lasted until 1974 at least, but based on archival meeting minutes, the board was most active while Weaver was involved. Weaver retired as Extension director in 1961 and died in 1966.

understood as a single entity, a “total farm program,” and administered as such. Acting on this belief, the Board planned to undertake an extensive program for inter-agency cooperation at the state and county level in North Carolina. The Board immediately launched a state-wide initiative that became known as “The Challenge.” Announcing that “North Carolina Accepts the Challenge Through a United Agricultural Program,” the NCBOFA organized the state into “Challenge” districts to coordinate the actions of county officials and to direct local-level efforts at community improvement and farm income development. Weaver explained that the NCBFOA used The Challenge to “weld the work of the agricultural agencies into one united farm program” wherein all agricultural workers worked toward common goals.” Disjointed program administration was not unique to North Carolina, but the state’s response was. Federal Extension director, M.L. Wilson, lauded the NCBFOA’s goals. In 1952 he went before a potentially hostile House Appropriations committee armed with a copy of “North Carolina Accepts the Challenge Through a United Agricultural Program,” the mission statement of The Challenge. “I desired to show it to the Committee in case they raised a question or gave me an opportunity to show how State agencies can work together in a cooperative manner for the benefit of all,” he wrote to Weaver.²³

²³ M.L. Wilson to David Weaver, February 29, 1952, Box 19, Folder, “Wilson, M.L., 1948-1952,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

Where the referendum and committee systems emphasized democratic – if imperfectly so – solutions to the problems of agricultural organization and program administration, the NCBOFA was, at one level, a bureaucratic attempt to extract some unified and manageable agenda from the institutional chaos that was the USDA. Weaver believed strongly in the symbolism of the referendum, but he did not look to citizen-administrators to straighten out the mess that was North Carolina’s farm programs. Instead, he worked to build and strengthen networks among his professional peers. Quarterly, the NCBFOA met for dinner in Raleigh. Regular board members, along with NCDA officials, representatives from the Governor’s office (and at least one, the governor himself), and a shifting cast of other lower level North Carolina officials, visiting officials from other states, journalists, businessmen, and bankers all frequented these meetings. Here they discussed policy questions and highlighted the actions and accomplishments of individual agencies. They also discussed the generally accepted outlines of North Carolina’s farm problem: the prevalence of small farms and the low incomes that such farms earned, the need for greater agricultural diversity in the state, and the general need to increase the state’s competitive position relative to other farm states.²⁴

²⁴ See 1950s minutes of the NCBOFA, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, Box 14, Binder “Minutes of the Meeting [sic] of the North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies, 1956-1959,” NCSU.

The 1951 meeting of state level supervisors concluded that while “on the state level we have had very fine relationships in the past,” but unfortunately “this same excellent coordination was not evidenced in all of our counties.”²⁵ In order to facilitate improved county-level coordination, the NCBOFA created Challenge committees, a structure that mirrored that of the PMA committee system and Extension Advisory committee system at the county and state level. Farmers were to form community councils for cooperative action to address specific local problems, while all paid agricultural workers (including the PMA committeemen) and other individuals such as bankers, farm supply and equipment retailers, and farm organizations formed the County Agricultural Councils, one step above the community councils. The County Steering committee, comprised of a single representative of all federal agencies in the county, the chairs of the community councils, and the farm and home extension agents served as the link between the community level organizations and the NCBFOA.²⁶

Bureaucratic coordination was an important goal of the Challenge, but Weaver and other organizers never intended for the program to be restricted only to internal institutional concerns. They did not consider the harmonization of program work to ease bureaucratic entanglements and conflicts to be the only goal. This coordination was

²⁵ David Weaver to M.L. Wilson, March 19, 1951, Folder “Wilson, M.L.,” Box 19, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

²⁶ “Suggested Operating Report of the Challenge Program,” Box 6, Folder “Circular Letters, July - Dec, 1954,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

instead as a means toward the modernization of North Carolina's farming sector.

Weaver dreamed of a grassroots movement for rural modernization and standard-of-living improvement guided and nurtured by the Challenge. He hoped that the community councils and aggressive promotion of Challenge initiatives by county farm agency officials and the local press would make "The Challenge" a household phrase.

A favorite tool of The Challenge, contests and competition, employed participatory methods to encourage farmers to adopt more progressive farming methods. The Extension Service, in partnership with local newspapers, bankers, and chambers of commerce, sponsored production and community improvement contests that rewarded participants for record setting yields and the adoption of new technologies. The North Carolina State Fair featured Challenge exhibits from individual communities and clubs, and communities won recognition for collective yield and quality gains.²⁷ Local papers such as the *Wilson Daily Times* sponsored contests in which individual farms competed for the most improvement in their income and in the condition of their home, and in which communities competed for the best improvement of community resources. In 1953, seventy-seven of the state's one hundred counties competed for the title of "County of the Year in Rural Progress," in which the top five scoring counties received a combined \$3,500.00 in awards. In 1957, *The News and*

²⁷ Governor's Office, "The 89th North Carolina State Fair," (Raleigh, N.C.: State of North Carolina, June 14, 1956) p. 10.

Observer sponsored a farm income contest in which farmers competed to raise their incomes in 1957 from their incomes in 1956. They received points for engaging in new enterprises, for increasing their income in established enterprises, and for improving their farm and home facilities. The winners were to be recognized in a special edition of the *News and Observer* and at an award ceremony hosted by the NCBFOA.²⁸ Such contests were held annually for the duration of The Challenge, and through this mechanism the NCBFOA hoped that the program would “enter into the family and personal life of all the people.” Efforts to win these contests “could be the basis of discussion at every dining table in the county.”²⁹

²⁸ “Minutes of Meeting of North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies,” January 27, 1958, p. 1, Box 14, Binder “Minutes of the Meeting [sic] of the North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies, 1956-1959,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

²⁹ David Weaver, “The Challenge – Teamwork Approach to Agricultural Problems in North Carolina,” p. 3, David Stathem Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, Box 1, Folder 6, NCSU. For a brief discussion of The Challenge, see Peter Benson, *Tobacco Capitalism: Growers, Migrant Workers, and the Changing Face of Global Industry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012): 89. Benson incorrectly states that The Challenge began in 1954 and that it was organized by the “North Carolina state government.” While the NCDA was part of the founding group of the NCBFOA, and the governor’s office participated in some meetings, the organization consisted of private organizations and federal agencies as well, and it was not primarily an initiative of NC state agencies.



Figure 9: "Making Good tobacco Better," 1953, Exhibit of the type sponsored and encouraged by the Challenge Program³⁰

The Extension Service regarded contests as important teaching tools in which prizes and recognition were useful in sparking interest in new methods and convincing farmers to put them into use for the first time. Therefore the professional organization of Extension Agents admonished its members to “observe caution in promotion contests, that emphasis be placed on the education feature of the project involved and not on the award. . . . The real value of the contest is lost when the participant enters with the sole idea of winning. Dishonesty may be encouraged and other bad results follow unless the

³⁰ “View of Display titled “Making Good Tobacco Better: Tobacco the Golden Weed – What it Means for N.C.,” 1953, item number 0007574, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina. Used with permission.

educational value of a contest is emphasized above the award that may be received.”³¹

Contests were short-term initiatives to jump-start participation and to encourage farmers to adopt new practices and to see the results of those practices on their own farms. In this manner the contest was simply another manifestation of the demonstration method.

Nevertheless, contests were not only teaching tools. They also served the purpose of regulating farm behavior. “Naming and shaming” is a recognized tool of government-based and independent regulators, who often use their ability to negatively impact a company’s reputation by publicizing violations in order to coax firms into compliance. Naming and shaming might be a group’s only tool, where standards are voluntary or the oversight organization’s standing is uncertain. Extension contests operated as the opposite of naming and shaming by showering successful contest entrants with approbation and recognition, thus supporting and burnishing their reputations. These reputational gains could result in continued assistance and attention from Extension staff and other farm agencies and favorable treatment from creditors when applying for new loans. Winning contests also came with immediate awards, often of cash, but sometimes other prizes as well whose value was both real and

³¹ North Carolina County Agents’ Association, “Ethics for Extension Workers,” p. 2, Box 8, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

symbolic.³² Unable to actually make rules and enforce compliance, the Extension Service promoted progressive commercial farming through its relationship with other regulatory and credit issuing agencies. They also used contests, rooted in Extension's demonstration method, to provide monetary and reputational incentives for farmer to adopt Extension-sanctioned methods.

Challenge Met?

In 1954, the leaders of the NCBOFA began evaluating the progress of The Challenge. They found that they had achieved some success in coordinating the work of the different farm agencies in the state. The "appraisal of the Challenge program to date" found that working relations among agency and organization leaders had improved since the early 1950s, that lower level agency workers were better informed about research, and that those workers had achieved a better "understand[ing] of the

³² There is an academic and popular literature on "naming and shaming" that examines the deterrent or disciplinary effectiveness of calling public attention to irresponsible actors or egregious offenders of regulations or ethical norms. This strategy is used in a variety of contexts, including: public naming of human rights violators by other governments or non-governmental organizations or mandated public disclosure of campaign finance or other lobbying payments or receipts in the context of electoral politics. Naming and shaming is a regulatory strategy that is often associated with third-party observers (such as an environmental NGO that calls attention to violations of pollution laws by corporate firms), or with self-regulation by industry or trade groups. Naming and shaming relies on the assumption that regulated firms place sufficient value in their reputations and that they would protect those reputations by avoiding behaviors that would lead to public naming and shaming. It also assumes that transparency and public scrutiny ("sunlight") will induce actors to behave more scrupulously than they would if their actions occurred in secret. See for example: Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, "Sticks and Stones: Naming and Shaming the Human Rights Enforcement Problem," *International Organization* 62, no. 4, (October 2008): 689–716; Ray, Pawson, "Evidence and Policy and Naming and Shaming," *Policy Studies* 23, no. 3/4 (2002): 211–230; The Economist, Intelligence Unit, "Naming and Shaming: The Fight Against Corruption," *The Economist*, October 2010: 66.

problems and potentials of agriculture and rural life in their respective areas.”³³ The NCFBOA believed that the greatest results of The Challenge could be seen in the growth of farm size and overall production in the state. “A very fine feeling of progressive cooperation has been established, which was undoubtedly been a factor in North Carolina’s rather unique position of making actual progress in agricultural income when the reverse has been true in most of the nation.”³⁴ Average farm income was on the rise in North Carolina and so too was the size of the state’s farms. While many factors contributed to the growth of average farm size in the state, the progressive agriculturalists of the NCFBOA believed this to be an example of the success of better coordinated program implementation.

A more systematic review of The Challenge in 1957 yielded a more complicated picture. The NCFBOA did not speak with one mind about the purposes of The Challenge or its progress toward its goals when the initiative underwent its five year review in 1957. A special committee, comprised of Weaver, along with, Gwyn Price, NCBOFA chairman, A.G. Bullard of the Vocational Agricultural Education program, and Horace Isenhour of the FHA conducted a study on the “Programs, Organization

³³ Challenge Advisory Committee, “Suggested Operating Report of the Challenge Program,” p. 1, Box 6, Folder “Circular Letters, July – Dec, 1954,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

³⁴ Gwyn B. Price to The Chairman and Secretary of All County Agricultural Workers’ Councils, Jan. 15, 1957, Box 6, Folder, “Agr. Ext. Circular Letters, Jan. - June, 1957,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

and Management of the Agricultural Extension Service,” in which the committee evaluated the impact of The Challenge on the workings of the Extension Service specifically. The committee’s report was critical, and was hotly debated in the September, 1957 meeting of the NCBFOA. Most controversial was the committee’s assessment that “though carefully sought for” they “found no evidence that Extension Service Programs have in any way [been] re-directed or made effective by the Challenge mechanism.”³⁵ A second special committee, appointed to evaluate the findings of the review committee, disagreed. In their assessment, the Extension Service had “speeded up progress toward recognized goals.” This evaluation of the Extension Service under the Challenge illuminates the degree to which progressive farming goals informed the design and implementation of The Challenge. The initiative was not intended to change the structures or the goals of the farm agencies, only to make them work more efficiently toward the already established goal of promoting commercial agriculture in the state.

A second critique by the NCBFOA committee on Extension work illuminated more subtle but still significant weakness of The Challenge. Both the study committee, and the committee on the report agreed that “there is a wide difference of opinion on what the Challenge is. There is also misunderstanding concerning the relation of each

³⁵ “Minutes of the Meeting of North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agricultural Agencies,” p. 2, Box 14, Binder “Minutes of the Meeting [sic] of the North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies, 1956-1959,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU

agency and organization to the Challenge.” This seemed particularly true at the county level, and the NCBFOA recommended more training for personnel. This assessment was disappointing to Weaver, who believed that “unification at the top level was not enough. Many of the agencies had district and county level personnel. One of the challenges of the ‘Challenge’ appears to be the welding together of all interests at all levels to carry out the program.”³⁶ But five years into the program, The Challenge had been most successful in creating a coalition of elites – state-level federal agency directors, state government officials, college administrators, and the press – but the rank and file agency workers remained puzzled about how The Challenge was supposed to affect their day to day work.

The NCBOFA and the Challenge proved most effective when responding to specific problems of program implementation. One such response, in 1957, demonstrated the capacity of the Board to engender a multi-agency response to a complex administrative problem in the ASC. The ASC, like the PMA and AAA before it, employed temporary workers each spring and early summer to measure the area of regulated crops planted by individual farmers to determine if plantings complied with the restrictions of their allotments. In response to widespread concerns about the accuracy of these measurements, the Board appointed a committee of its members from

³⁶ David S. Weaver, “The Challenge – Teamwork Approach to Agricultural Problems in North Carolina,” [draft] Box 1, Folder 6, David Stathem Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, NCSU.

the ASC and other agencies to study the problem. Professional surveyors and ASC employees measured the same fields, the surveyors “in accordance with standard civil engineering practices” and the ASC employees in their usual manner. Such measurements were not simple determinations of the area within a set of boundaries. Unplanted spaces inside the area (such as truck rows in tobacco), along with irregularly shaped or uncultivable areas, complicated the measurers’ task.³⁷

The ASC confronted obstacles to conducting these measurements annually. High turnover meant that inexperienced and newly trained personnel were asked to perform measurements of hundreds of acres across multiple farms with accuracy within 1/100 of an acre, while operating within budget.³⁸ The study found that ASC measurements were indeed inaccurate, and that without contracting with professional surveyors for all allotment measurements, the stipulated 1/100 of an acre accuracy requirement was unrealistic. The committee recommended small changes in method and tools would help, but the costs of meeting the regulations, for the agencies, was just too high. In general the study found that ASC land measurements erred on the side of

³⁷ “Presentation Made to the Board of Farm Organizations and Agricultural Agencies,” October 28, 1957, p. 1, Box 14, Binder “Minutes of the Meeting [sic] of the North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies, 1956-1959,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU

³⁸ “Presentation Made to the Board of Farm Organizations and Agricultural Agencies,” October 28, 1957, p. 1, Box 14, Binder “Minutes of the Meeting [sic] of the North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies, 1956-1959,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU

the farmer, allowing slightly too large plantings rather than unnecessarily causing farmers to reduce their plantings.³⁹ The multi-agency board made policy recommendations that would somewhat improve the ASC's enforcement of allotment regulations while easing the concerns of those who worried that mistakes were detrimental to farmers. The NCBFOA also supported the ASC's request for more funds from the USDA to implement the Board's recommendations.⁴⁰

These problems solving efforts at the level of bureaucratic middle-management were NCBOFA's and The Challenge's real success. The NCBOFA's members were those who were best able to affect administrative change, and to work together, supporting each other in their efforts to achieve support and compliance from below and to exercise the discretion granted from above to implement their vision for progressive agriculture in the state. This coalition also allowed agencies, such as the ASC, to legitimate their implementation methods against the charges of detractors and to lobby superiors for a greater share of available resources. Weaver's success as a bureaucratic entrepreneur was in leveraging his own network of professional contacts to build this coalition. From

³⁹ "Presentation Made to the Board of Farm Organizations and Agricultural Agencies," October 28, 1957, pp. 2-4, Box 14, Binder "Minutes of the Meeting [sic] of the North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies, 1956-1959," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU

⁴⁰ "Presentation Made to the Board of Farm Organizations and Agricultural Agencies," October 28, 1957, p. 4, Box 14, Binder "Minutes of the Meeting [sic] of the North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies, 1956-1959," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU

his position as vice-chair, he exercised consistent leadership, while articulating an expansive vision for an organization whose work was actually most concerned with the banal details of bureaucratic practice.

Weaver's entrepreneurialism was limited to the specific realm of administrative politics. In other areas he proved conservative and generally willing to comply with the status quo. The segregated nature of the Extension Service and land grant college system – enormous inefficiency in the delivery of services if ever there was one – went unquestioned by Weaver. He struck a tone of resigned weariness when faced with the daily absurdities that accompanied segregation, and which conspired to make administration of his department more difficult. For example, senior Negro Agents, based at North Carolina A&T, could not park their cars on the NC State College campus when they were required to attend meetings. Parking tickets and towing on campus so plagued these African-American agents that Weaver wrote to the college parking authority asking for exceptions to the segregated parking rules on meeting days to reduce the time his office spent addressing parking violations.⁴¹ If he ever questioned the fundamental premise of the segregated Extension Service, that critique does not survive in the archive. Weaver did not blaze new trails for administrative or social reform. He emphatically believed in the work of the Extension Service and the other

⁴¹ cite

federal farm agencies as already defined and he hoped to make that work more effective.

Conclusion

While David Weaver dreamed of a “total farm program” and sought to bring it about in North Carolina, the reality of federal farm programs was one of disjuncture and decentralization. Not only were farm regulatory duties splintered and distributed within the USDA to various internal agencies, farm programs that regulated production levels and subsidized prices, issued credit, and facilitated conservation took place through separate legislative acts and under the auspices of multiple USDA agencies.⁴² Weaver believed the small average size of North Carolina’s farms relative to other Southern state was evidence of the failure of farm agencies to successfully administer farm programs and promote progressive agriculture in a coordinated fashion. He saw a need for leadership and moved to fill it.⁴³ The NCBFOA provided a consistent vision of government-supported progressive agriculture in North Carolina when leadership was lacking from Washington.

⁴² This does not even consider the other regulatory duties of the USDA not directly related to on-farm operations, such as meat inspection and fertilizer standards.

⁴³ David S. Weaver to All-District and Farm Home Agents, July 22, 1953, Folder Circular Letters, July 1 – Dec. 31, 1953, Box 6, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

The participants of the Challenge worked to facilitate farm growth in North Carolina and advance the progression of commercial agriculture in the state through better coordinated program administration across agencies. In providing direction and leadership for farm agencies and coordinating the actions of farm program directors, The Challenge and the NCBFOA were most successful. The meeting minutes and various materials of the NCBFOA demonstrate the commitment of North Carolina's agricultural agency leaders to better understanding each other's work and coordinating their actions on the state level.

Weaver was a skilled and successful entrepreneurial bureaucrat. He drew upon an extensive network and his own unimpeachable reputation to coordinate farm program implementation in North Carolina during a time when the upper levels of the USDA were engaged in bitter partisan conflicts over the purposes and mechanism of those programs. Ezra Taft Benson's USDA was too ambivalent about the ultimate goals of farm policies to engage in any kind of unifying leadership of the various agencies. Weaver and his colleagues filled the vacuum locally by forming a cross-agency coalition of farm policy makers, program directors, and farm organizations.

Whether or not they were successful depends on how one measures success. In achieving administrative cooperation at the managerial level of the farm bureaucracy, the NCBFOA was very successful. In implementing Weaver's more expansive vision for

grassroots mobilization toward progressive agriculture in the state, the Challenge was doomed to fail. He hoped that farm yield and community improvement contests would germinate the growth of a widespread shift to more efficient farming (and the corresponding increased farm incomes) by enticing small farms to pursue full time commercial farming. These farms would then become full-fledged progressive farms, participants in the farm programs and clients of the Farm State. Weaver spoke of a social movement, but it was a curious kind of social movement he had in mind. It was to be lead from the top by the Extension Service and would bring citizens fully into the fold of government farm programs by changing their behavior to conform to the progressive farming model these programs promoted. Weaver's vision did not involve these otherwise marginal groups reshaping the Farm State to better meet their needs.

This was a very different kind of movement than the anti-poverty movements that would take hold in the 1960s and 1970s when African-American women organized themselves to achieve better service delivery from welfare intuitions by making them more responsive to their particular needs in context.⁴⁴ Extension always fancied itself a movement, but it was limited in its scope. Progressive agriculture ideology so pervaded

⁴⁴ Lisa Levenstein, *A Movement Without Marches: African American Women and the Politics of Poverty in Postwar Philadelphia*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). See also on the War on Poverty: Lisa Gayle Hazirjian and Annelise Orleck, eds. *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Robert Korstad and James Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs: The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Poverty and Inequality in 1960s America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Annelise, Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

and shaped Extension goals – and consequently those of other farm agencies. Many farmers would never fit the progressive farming mold. As long as progressive farming was the only acceptable mode of production within the Farm State, and then the harsh reality was that farm programs, even if well implemented, would boost farm incomes only by reducing the number of farmers who competed for their share.

Chapter 5: Progressive Family Farming

Policy makers and farmers influenced by progressive farming ideology in the 1950s saw no contradiction between family farming and industrialized agriculture. Independent, mechanized, efficient farming operations owned and managed by family units, were, for agricultural leaders of the Carolinas, the ultimate goal of progressive farm policy. In the progressive farming vision for rural communities, the “family farm” was the ideal social and productive unit, and farm policies and programs were intended to secure and stabilize their income, a significant challenge in the context of rising consumer prices and the constant fight to stave off surplus production. Farm policy makers pursued a strategy of encouraging progressive farming as a response to the problems of the farm economy. This philosophy very narrowly defined what a commercial farm should be like: white, educated, community leaders who embraced technology and consumer goods. Farm agencies and agents focused their efforts on these families. Those families that either could not or did not meet these expectations received less help from federal farm agencies, which followed policies intended to encourage such farmers to leave agriculture rather than succeeded on a smaller scale.

Progressive farmers who made the grade in the early post war years took part in a new approach to commercial agricultural production. The land-owning farmer became a manager. For many, this included some degree of entrepreneurialism.

Commercial farmers expanded the family enterprise into processing, packing, and marketing of farm produce by building gins, warehouses, and packing houses, and sometimes operating stores or other small businesses unrelated to the farm. Ambitious farmers diversified their commodities and invested in specialized equipment.

Successful progressive family farms also employed many people as tenants and as wage hands. For these progressive farming families, the emphasis was on the implementation of family management, not the minimization of hired labor.

Many farming families were excluded, some by circumstance and some by definition, from the ranks of the successful progressive farms. The uniform whiteness of farm organization leaders, farm agency committee members, and award recipients demonstrated the ideal racial profile of these farmers. The nuclear family with defined gender roles in the marriage and a protected period of childhood for children became more important as farming families attained middle class lifestyles and practiced middle class consumerism. While policy makers imagined the ideal successful farm family to be a white, nuclear, and middle class unit who owned their land and engaged in agriculture full-time, reality was more complex. Tenants, share croppers, part-time farmers who held factory jobs, African-American and female land owners, and farmers who favored older, less mechanized production methods all found themselves outside the progressive farming circle.

When farm policy content and implementation took this restrictive idea of progressive farming as its point of reference and goal, the resulting programs were poorly suited to aid individuals and families that did not fit the mold. Over the course of the 1950s, policy makers defended their decision to focus their efforts in aid and education on commercial farmers. “In-between” and very small farms received less benefit from federal programs such as the Extension Service, allotment policies actively worked to encourage such farmers to become full-fledged commercial farmers or to leave agriculture entirely. Many such farms lacked the resources to become full-time commercial farmers, and some preferred their lives “in-between.” In a progressive farming economy shaped and supported by federal programs and plagued by unrelenting over-production, there was room for only one kind of farmer. Making this vision a reality was a policy goal of the 1950s farm agencies.

The Master Farm Families

Progressive farming, as an approach to commercial farming in the United States was not a new philosophy among farm policy makers, farm organizations in the post war period. The term gained popularity in the early twentieth century and was popularized in large part by the farm magazine bearing the title *Progressive Farmer*.¹

¹ The *Progressive Farmer* thrived under the leadership of Clarence Poe, and during his long tenure it achieved regional dominance as the most widely circulated farm magazine in the south. Poe has been the subject of much study by agricultural and southern historians over time. They examined the effect of the

The magazine promoted the use of scientific farming methods and encouraged engagement with the Extension service. In the 1920s, farm magazines across the county, working in partnership with their local Extension officials, began to recognize farming families who exemplified progressive farming in practice with the title of “Master Farm Family.” This award originated with a mid-western farm magazine in 1926 and was picked up by several other farm publications, including *The Progressive Farmer*, in 1927.²

Clarence Poe, the influential *Progressive Farmer* editor, promoted the award in its early years and worked to develop its prestige. In 1928, he asserted that the purpose of the award was to recognize the efforts of truly excellent farmers, to provide encouragement for their hard work, and to demonstrate the value of modernization and efficiency in farm operations. Poe further stressed the role of leadership and the need to reward those who met this challenge. “Because there has been until now little or no public notice of the men who made good is undoubtedly one reason why the farm has

agricultural press on political debates and farm development, Poe’s personal and political connections, and Poe’s stance as a white supremacist. Jack Temple Kirby, “Clarence Poe’s Vision of a Segregated ‘Great Rural Civilization,’” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 68 (Winter 1969): 27-38; Joseph A. Côté, “Clarence Hamilton Poe: The Farmer’s Voice, 1899-1964,” *Agricultural History* 53, no. 1 (January 1, 1979): 30-41; C. G. Scruggs and Smith W. Moseley. “The Role of Agricultural Journalism in Building the Rural South,” *Agricultural History* 53, no. 1 (January 1, 1979): 22-29.

² Master Farm Family award history documents compiled in the 1950s trace the first award to the magazine *The Prairie Farmer* and its editor Clifford V. Gregory in 1925. “Part A, The Master Farm Family Award Program from 1925 to 1957,” p. 1, Box 13, Folder “Master Farm Family, 1954-1957,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

lost a great deal of its potential leadership. The state, the county, and the community have not recognized the services of the good farmer. The approval and commendation of one's fellows constitutes a great incentive to effort – and this incentive agriculture has lacked.”³ These “men who made good” did so in close contact with federal agricultural officials. “The Master Farm Movement also vindicates the work of agricultural leaders, the extension service, farm papers, etc. In all the states this has been of one of the outstanding demonstrations. Farmers who have proved themselves worthy of the highest honors have been men who have been in close touch with the county agents, agricultural teachers, and other rural leaders.”⁴ Given these prerequisites for mastery, the *Progressive Farmer* relied heavily on the judgment of Extension officials to identify candidates for Master Farm Family award.

Extension officials nominated candidates in their districts,⁵ and while it was generally understood that an agent would not nominate an unqualified family, nominees underwent close scrutiny from visiting agents and magazine personnel in order to choose the winners. Nominees filled out highly detailed applications that

³ “Dr. Clarence Poe, Senior Editor and Board Chairman of the *Progressive Farmer*, Stresses Benefits,” p. 2, Box 13, Folder “Master Farm Family, 1954-1957,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁴ “Dr. Clarence Poe, Senior Editor and Board Chairman of the *Progressive Farmer*, Stresses Benefits,” Box 13, Folder “Master Farm Family, 1954-1957,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010.

⁵ To prevent diluting the prestige of the MFF title, it was not awarded annually in every state. The award was issued in an individual state only once every three years or so.

detailed their farm accounting practices and disclosed profits and losses on all aspects of their farming operation. Judges expected that successful candidates would achieve yields and profits well beyond the average farmer in their region and demonstrate good management of the income and profits. In addition to their financial well-being, Master Farm Family candidates were judged on the condition of farm buildings and fences, the layout of their fields, their use of modern technologies, and their conservation efforts. Furthermore, aspiring Master Farmers needed a proven track record of community involvement. The average Master Farmer's resume included membership in the local Farm Bureau (often serving a term as county chairman), and participation in the AAA, Soil Conservation Service, or Extension committees in the county. They joined commodity specific associations (such as cotton grower or dairymen's associations), held offices in their churches, and joined other civic or fraternal organizations. They often held elected office on county boards of commissioners or the local school board.⁶ The Master Farm Family score books solicited equally detailed information about the pursuits of wives and children with similarly high expectations.

Over the course of the 1940s and 1950s commercial farmers and agricultural leaders came to recognize the successful progressive farmer as a businessman. The *Progressive Farmer* described South Carolina farmer Hugh McGee as "a business farmer."

⁶ See for example: "George R. McMillian, Master Farm Family Record, 1950," Box 110, Folder 8, Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

A photo showed him “at his desk, [where] he makes plans, carries on important business, and then checks up on results.”⁷ For farmers like McGee, “farm management” was the primary focus of their work. They continued to perform farm labor, but management was their primary duty.⁸ This occupational skill contributed greatly to the Master Farm Families’ success and set them apart as the best farmers in their

⁷ William C. LaRue, “Meet the McGee Master Farm Family,” *The Progressive Farmer*, September 1950, p. 24, Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁸ Historians of Mid-west and Great Plains agriculture have examined the development of farm management as a profession. Land grant colleges educated young men in the sciences of horticulture and agronomy, as well as in agricultural economics and engineering. Many such students graduated and pursued careers in the Extension Service or the growing agricultural firms mass producing agricultural supplies including seed, fertilizers, and mechanical equipment. Some land grant college agriculture program graduates took their skills back to the farm and became owner-operators of their own farms or took on managerial posts on large farms, often with absentee owners. The bonanza wheat farms in the Dakotas and Minnesota provided an early example of professionalized farm management positions. Investors with little to no farm experience or agricultural knowledge sought educated and experienced farm managers to oversee their thousands of acres of wheat and the fleets of tractors and mechanical harvesters they purchased to tend the land.

The established system of sharecropping and tenancy, that divided the farm land of the Carolinas into small plots, and the ability of tobacco, especially, to support small operations kept farm sizes in the Carolinas small in the early twentieth century. Farm management was a task rather than a job description. The period of the 1930s through the 1960s was one of transition in the Carolinas. A labor system of tenancy and sharecropping resembling the plantation system shifted to one of wage labor – gradually redefining relationships between landowners and farm workers. A manager is not the same as a paternalist planter. As farms became more concentrated, more mechanized, and more dependent on wage labor, the task of farm owners also changed. For those small farms on which owners often took on the majority of the necessary work – along with their families – farm work became more automated, more technology driven, and required a stronger grasp of the financial and technological justifications for particular methods of production. For land owners more accustomed to supervising tenants and share croppers, such oversight became focused on coordinating actions among tenants, creating greater harmony and in production plans and methods, sharing equipment, and resources, and, increasingly, consolidating holdings and reducing the number of tenants. All of these tasks, on large farms and small, more closely resembled the work of contemporary industrial managerial counterparts than that of farmers of earlier decades.

See: Deborah Kay Fitzgerald, *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Harold Woodman, *New South – New Law: The Legal Foundations of Credit and Labor Relations in the Postbellum Agricultural South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

communities. Farm management, as a distinct category of farm work, garnered new recognition in the late 1940s and early 1950s and became a designated category of Extension specialization, alongside individual commodities and other discrete research areas. It was one career option for graduates of the College of Agriculture at NC State. In late 1953, John W. Clark, then president of Randolph Mills in Franklinton, North Carolina, wrote to David Weaver seeking a recommendation of an NC State graduate who could take on the job of assistant manager at Clark's farm near Scotland Neck. Clark already employed a manager (also a NC State alumnus), but he planned to expand his operation to include a 1000-head cattle herd, the management of which would be a full time job in its own right. Clark wanted a recent graduate to fill the post who exhibited potential to become manager of the entire farm. He hoped to lure a qualified person by providing the new hire with a "six-room modern home," no mere tenant house. Weaver felt confident that this combination of opportunity and compensation "should attract an aggressive young man to take on such an assignment as his life work."⁹

⁹ David Weaver to John Clark, December 29, 1953, Box 19, Folder "D.S. Weaver, 1953-1955," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

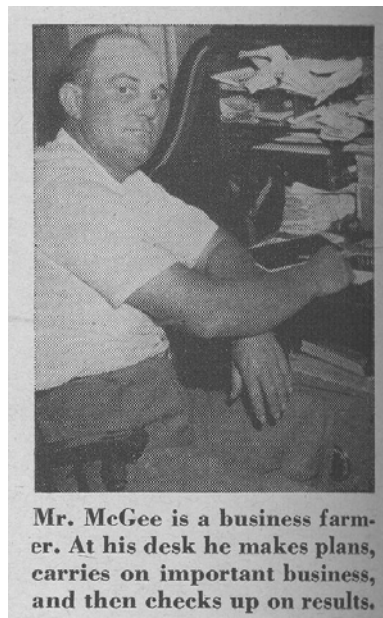


Figure 10: Hugh McGee, as pictured in the *Progressive Farmer*, in recognition of the Master Farm Family Award¹⁰

Farm managers also developed their own professional organizations in the in this period. In 1949, North Carolinians who attended the annual meeting of the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers returned to found a North Carolina chapter.¹¹ The next year, North Carolina hosted the American Society annual meeting, and the state chapter developed into an active society that hosted tours and educational programs for its members and awarded scholarships for aspiring farm

¹⁰ William C. LaRue, "Meet the McGee Master Farm Family," *The Progressive Farmer*, September 1950, p. 19, Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI. Photo Used with permission. The Progressive Farmer, Copyright 1950; Copyright 2013 Telvent/DTN LLC. All rights reserved.

¹¹ "The North Carolina Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers," 1984, p. 11, Box 3, Folder 8, North Carolina Agricultural Organizations Records, 1887-1986, NCSU.

managers to attend the School of Agriculture at North Carolina State College.¹² Local farm managers associations were also active in the era, such as the Edgecombe County Farm Manager's Association that in the March, 1953 meeting hosted the Extension Farm Management Specialist from NC State College.¹³

The increased importance of "farm management" to Southern farming operations and to progressive farming advocates became apparent in the late 1940s in the scrutiny tenancy arrangements received from the North Carolina Extension Service. The economic conditions of the Depression had driven some tenants from the land, and the commodity production restrictions and cash payments instituted by the AAA contributed to a further reduction in the ranks of tenant farmers and share croppers. But in North and South Carolina, tenancy and share cropping remained important sources of farm labor. When Extension officials turned their attention to the details of these arrangements, it was, to some degree, a response to concerns about the low standard of living and exploitative work conditions these laborers faced. Primarily, however, this attention resulted from concerns over the inefficiency of very small farming units and an

¹² "The North Carolina Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers," 1984, p. 12, Box 3, Folder 8, North Carolina Agricultural Organizations Records, 1887-1986, NCSU.

¹³ "Farm Managers Plan Meeting," *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, NC), March 19, 1953. The Edgecombe County, NC, Farm Manager's Association counted among its members, in 1953, serving and future ASC county committeemen, county commissioners, and other young farmers who would become prominent in commodity organizations and the Farm Bureau.

expectation that better management of tenant holdings would increase their productivity and reduce instability in the labor market

In 1941,¹⁴ Edgecombe County Extension agents launched the “Farm and Home Improvement Program.” The initiative suffered from terrible timing, stalling out after the United States entered World War II and farm agencies directed their efforts to war-time food production. But at the conclusion of the war, the program began again as a master’s degree project, conducted by an N.C. State agricultural economics student with the enthusiastic support of the Extension service. The Farm and Home Improvement Program did not seek to eliminate tenancy, but to develop land owner’s managerial skills and consolidate his control over the planning and implementation of progressive farming methods across multiple tenant holdings. Extension agents recruited resident landlords who employed between five and ten tenant families and who were willing to allow significant Extension involvement on their farm planning and operations.¹⁵ Extension agents met with the landlord and his wife, and together they drew up a plan for the entire farm. They examined the farm as a single unit rather than considering

¹⁴ This Extension project culminated in a master’s thesis in the department of Agricultural Economics. William Lindsay Turner, “A Study of the Farm and Home Improvement Program, Edgecombe County, 1946-1949,” (master’s thesis, NCSU, 1950). This program had a brief run in 1940-41 but was cut short by World War II. The program started over again in 1946.

¹⁵ The program required all tenants to be of the same race. “Report on the Farm and Home Improvement Program (Landlord-Tenant Relationship Program) in Edgecombe County,” p. 1, Box 19, Folder “Wilson, M.L., 1948-1952,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

tenant's or share cropper's holding individually. This was a key step to stream-lining and "improving" the management of the entire farm, emphasizing efficiency and resource use by the land owners. In this meeting, Extension agents and land owners identified aspects of landlord and tenant relationships that should be formalized in written agreements to facilitate this effort.¹⁶



Figure 11: "White Tenant farm works off shares, North Carolina," photo by Dorothea Lange¹⁷

¹⁶ The South Carolina Extension service had conducted a tenant and share cropper program in the mid-1930s that was similar in many respects, but most heavily focused on improving the standard of living for tenant farming families and less concerned with whole farm management. "Work of the South Carolina Extension Service with Tenants and Share croppers, 1936," pp. 10-15, Box 23, Folder 696, Cooperative Extension Service, Field Operations, 1918-1985, STI.

¹⁷ Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, LC-USF34-009645-E DLC (b&w film nitrate neg.) http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?fsaall:54::/temp/~ammem_itj2:: (April 10, 2013). Used with permission.

After the plan was developed, and the details of landlord and labor agreements determined, Extension agents and the landowners invited tenants to a meeting in which they received a presentation on the Farm and Home Improvement program. "Using movies and slides to illustrate the discussion," agents explained the goals of the program to improve landlord and tenant relations and presented the plan for the farm. At the end of the meeting, the leaders "asked whether[the tenants] would like to participate in such a program. If they agree to participate the program is started on that farm."¹⁸ This top-down approach characterized the farm's progression through the program. The heaviest obligations skewed toward the tenants, while the authority to make decisions about farm management rested with the landlords.

For a period of five years, the program supported the managerial efforts of landlords and strongly encouraged tenants to recognize managerial authority while educating them on the ways of progressive farming. Landlords and Extension officials maintained detailed plans that addressed all aspects of production and the farm's business arrangements. Tenants and landlords agreed to follow these plans.¹⁹ Extension

¹⁸ "Report on the Farm and Home Improvement Program (Landlord-Tenant Relationship Program) in Edgecombe County," Box 19, Folder "Wilson, M.L., 1948-1952," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

¹⁹ While containing many elements of a lease, Extension officials took care to note that such plans were not to be construed as formal leases because of the obligations landlords would incur in such a contracts. Rather the plans would be guidelines for landlord-tenant relationship, mutually agreed upon but not legally binding. "Report on the Farm and Home Improvement Program (Landlord-Tenant Relationship Program)

agents provided support in the form of education and frequent visits to the farm, including regular visits with tenant families, for which the landowner was always present. Women formed home demonstration clubs, and the men participated in demonstration field work as a condition of the plan. Officials pressed tenant family children to join 4-H clubs. After five years of successful participation, the landowners and tenants “graduated,” to carry out what they learned unsupervised.²⁰

Extension officials declared the program a success. By 1950, incomes were up on participating farms, even in the face of reduced tobacco allotments and weather-related decreases in local peanut yields. Officials judged housing, sanitation, and nutrition conditions improved for tenant families, and observed the beneficial effects of soil conservation programs. Most important to Extension officials, mobility among tenants decreased sharply in Edgecombe County while it rose in neighboring counties. The study authors observed that among tenants and landlords “there is less friction, a greater respect for the landlord’s property on the part of the tenant, and a great

in Edgecombe County,” p. 1, Box 19, Folder “Wilson, M.L., 1948-1952,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

²⁰ “Report on the Farm and Home Improvement Program (Landlord-Tenant Relationship Program) in Edgecombe County,” p. 2, Box 19, Folder “Wilson, M.L., 1948-1952,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

appreciation of the needs of the tenant on the part of the landlord.”²¹ Tenants responded to surveys indicating that improvement in their living conditions – repaired and upgraded homes and assistance in food production and preservation – were the most valuable aspects of the Farm and Home Improvement Program. Progressive farming best practices and care for the landlord’s property ranked lower on this lists.²²

Landlords enjoyed higher property values, increased incomes, and decreased maintenance and repair bills.²³ Extension officials judged the success of the program by its benefits for land owners. Increased incomes, enhanced management skills, and greater acquiescence to that management by laborers indicated improvement in farm conditions. The chairman of the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Agriculture called it “an illustration of a very constructive program,” and complimented the Extension service on their work.²⁴ That farms with several tenants were now under unified management, and operated as single large farms in

²¹ “Report on the Farm and Home Improvement Program (Landlord-Tenant Relationship Program) in Edgecombe County,” Box 19, Folder “Wilson, M.L., 1948-1952,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

²² William Lindsay Turner, “A Study of the Farm and Home Improvement Program, Edgecombe County, 1946-1949,” 87. The study involved 22 white tenants and 49 black tenants. Fifty eight tenants total answered surveys about their experience. Black tenants overwhelming listed “home improvement” (30 families) and “home food production” (38) as the “parts of the Farm and Home Improvement Programs [that] have been of most benefit.” Only 5 listed “recommended farm practices and 12 “better cooperation for landlord and other tenant families.” Among white tenants, 10 listed “home improvement,” 8 “home food planning,” and only 3 included “recommended farm practices.”

²³ “Report on the Farm and Home Improvement Program (Landlord-Tenant Relationship Program) in Edgecombe County,” p. 3, Box 19, Folder “Wilson, M.L., 1948-1952,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

²⁴ M.L. Wilson to David Weaver, February 29, 1952, Box 19, Folder, “Wilson, M.L., 1948-1952,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

many respects, meant that such farms were much closer to the progressive farming ideal of active, unified management in 1950 than they had been before the war, even if they continued to employ tenant labor.

The division of land owners and tenants into managers and workers was also reinforced in progressive farming literature. This emphasis on management and a basic understanding of farm programs for would-be progressive farmers corresponded with the devaluation of managerial skills that workers and tenants gained through their own experience. Take for example the way the *Progressive Farmer* interpreted events in one Master Farmer's experience. George McMillion fell seriously ill during World War II while his five oldest sons were serving in the military. The *Progressive Farmer* reported that in response to the family's need, "neighbors and tenants came to their rescue. Tenants who had worked for years under the wise management of 'Mr. Mack' suddenly asserted their hidden talents for management, responsibility, and leadership to get the job done."²⁵ Such talents were almost certainly not "hidden" prior to McMillion's illness, but exercised informally. The *Progressive Farmer's* narrative, intended to demonstrate the loyalty the McMillions had earned from their tenants and neighbors, also revealed a fundamental assumption about farm management in this period: it was

²⁵ William C. LaRue, "Eight Sons, a Fine Wife, and Fine Neighbors Help a Fine Man," *The Progressive Farmer* (December, 1950): 86, Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

a job for a landowner or a professional. Tenants could be valued employees who were, in McMillion's words, "willing to work and do right." A good manager could learn from them, but such workers undertook real management tasks only when necessary, as a result of loyalty or extraordinary initiative, not as a regular part of their work as laborers.²⁶ Farm managers were landowners, or their sons, such as William Wooten. This 1947 Master Farmer began his career as the "supervisor of [his] father's farm."²⁷

Commercial farmers acquired their formal managerial skills through experience and education. For children and adolescents, school and community based 4-H and Future Farmers of America clubs provided early training in record keeping, home making, and scientific farm production methods. These programs emphasized mechanization and technology, and close consultation with Extension agents. Young farmers, most of whom did not attend college, still often needed additional information and instruction on how to access farm programs and obtain credit. If such farmers exhibited potential for progressive farming success and sought to follow that path, their

²⁶ William C. LaRue, "Eight Sons, a Fine Wife, and Fine Neighbors Help a Fine Man," *The Progressive Farmer* (December, 1950): 86, Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

²⁷ "The Master Farm Family Record, Mr. and Mrs. William M. Wooten," n.d. [ca. 1947], p. 2, Box 110, Folder 7, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI. For the classic historical account of the development of managerial capitalism in the United States, see Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977).

Extension agents, land grant colleges, and bankers associations stepped in to help fill the void.

Throughout the 1950s, the College of Agriculture at North Carolina State College staged week-long schools for young, white farmers, sponsored by the North Carolina Banker's association, known as the "Short Course in Modern Farming" or the "Banker's Short Course." Representatives from branch banks and community banks sponsored individual students at the short course.²⁸ Between 1953 and 1959, 819 young farmers went through the program.²⁹ One or two men from each county in their late teens or early twenties spent a week in February on the NC State campus getting a whirlwind tour of the College of Agriculture and state offices of the various federal farm agencies. They also received training to develop their business administration skills.³⁰

Instruction received at the short course went a step beyond what these young learned in their 4-H clubs and vocational agriculture classes in high school. One alumnus of the 1955 short course found this aspect of the especially enlightening: "I had studied some of this information . . . , both in the FFA and the 4-H Club, in high school, and at times during my study of these subjects it was a mystery to me where the

²⁸ "North Carolina Bankers Association, Key County Bankers for 1956-1957," Box 3, Folder 5, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Assistant Director Records, 1907-1978, NCSU.

²⁹ "Attendance at Short Course in Modern Farming," Box 3, Folder 11, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Assistant Director Records, 1907-1978, NCSU.

³⁰ "Program, Short Course in Modern Farming, N.C. State College, February 2-13, 1959" and "Farm Planning Worksheet, Short Course in Modern Farming," n.d. [1950s] Box 3, Folder 11, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Assistant Director Records, 1907-1978, NCSU.

information that the teacher was passing on to us came from.”³¹ The short course filled a growing gap between the College of Agriculture’s mission and the goals of its student body. Graduates of the College of Agriculture went to graduate school, to careers in state and federal agencies or to large agribusiness firms.³² Young men who intended to be farmers did not pursue four year degrees at the College of Agriculture. The week-long short course on N.C. State’s campus helped fill the knowledge gap and provided attendees with, as one student enthused, “a real college experience and the opportunity to make new friends.”³³

The modern farming short course attempted to help young farmers get their bearings in the complicated world of federal farm programs. The course provided practical instruction on the scope, authority, and goals of agencies such as the ASCS, the FHA, and the Extension service.³⁴ A student from Surry County put it simply: “[The course] gave me a clearer picture of how the agricultural agencies in this state are supposed to work. It also pointed out to me the possibility of help that I can obtain

³¹ “Student Reactions to the 1955 Short Course in Modern Farming,” p. 2, Box 3, Folder 5, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Assistant Director Records, 1907-1978, NCSU.

³² Maurice J. Pickler, “A Farmer’s Needs in Training and Service,” Planning for the School of Agriculture, A Symposium, North Carolina State College, December 10-11, 1957, pp. 76-79, Box 3, Unlabeled Folder, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

³³ “Student Reactions to the 1955 Short Course in Modern Farming,” p. 3, Box 3, Folder 5, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Assistant Director Records, 1907-1978, NCSU. NCSU would address this problem structurally in the 1960s with the creation of the Ag Institute, which issued 2-year degrees in practical agriculture intended for working farmers rather than the research-focused 4-year degree.

³⁴ Aside: urban poor has to fight to have access to this info; farmers get a short course and sponsorship by bankers

from agencies that are located in my county.”³⁵ Banker’s Short Course students also learned that their ability to get credit in the future would depend on their adoption of progressive farming methods. One 1955 attendee from Craven County understood this to be of benefit to himself and to the bankers: “I came home with the idea that there can be no prosperity and progress in any state unless there is a stable and profitable agriculture industry which supports a progressive rural people. The adoption of recommended and approved practices of the Agricultural Extension Service results in a more profitable crop and livestock production as well as increased farm income. Therefore, when I apply to the banker for credit to finance my farming operation, he desires to know what kind of practice I plan to use.”³⁶ The message students received was clear. In order to be successful commercial farmers, they would have to become managers who understood how to access federal farm supports. A degree of farm program savvy was also necessary if they were to gain access to commercial credit.

Progressive farming also involved diversification, both in crop choice and business activities. No award recipient focused exclusively on a single cash crop.³⁷ In the 1950s, Master Farm Families often also pursued business ventures, opening stores

³⁵ “Student Reactions to the 1955 Short Course in Modern Farming,” p. 1, Box 3, Folder 5, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Assistant Director Records, 1907-1978, NCSU.

³⁶ “Student Reactions to the 1955 Short Course in Modern Farming,” p. 3, Box 3, Folder 5, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Assistant Director Records, 1907-1978, NCSU.

³⁷ Dairy farmers are somewhat an exception. Most focused primarily on dairy, and grew other crops generally for feed or pasture land.

and other small businesses. Most commonly, these families invested in the processing and marketing of their crops by operating cotton gins and packing houses in which they conducted the initial processing of their own crops and those of their neighbors'. It was here that the Master Farm Family award's expectations of progressive farming are most readily apparent. Winners of the award were uniformly commercially focused with two or more cash crops and a significant interest in marketing as well as production.

The Lowder family of Sumter, South Carolina, was one such farm. Clayton Lowder operated the farm with his wife and their three children, but the Lowders did not start out their married life as farmers. They purchased their farm after fire destroyed a restaurant that they owned and operated. The Lowders used their savings to purchase a store, a cotton gin, a farm house and land.³⁸ Five years later, the family ran a cotton gin, and a packing house for sweet potatoes, which they sold in their store. Together, these enterprises added nearly \$18,000.00 to their income in 1952, over and above other farm receipts. They employed ten wage hands and five share croppers, some of whom had been on the farm for longer than the Lowders themselves, having worked for the previous owners.³⁹ The Lowders were an exception from the pattern of most Master Farm Families, having only been involved in agriculture for five years, rather than for

³⁸ "The Master Farm Family Record, Clayton Lowder," 1950, p. 21, Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

³⁹ "The Master Farm Family Record, Clayton Lowder," 1950, p. 18-19, Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI

decades or generations. The Extension officials who nominated the family felt that their determination and commitment to progressive farming allowed them to reach the level of a Master Farm Family so quickly and that they made a good example for others.⁴⁰

The McMillian family of Marion County South incorporated the principles of agribusiness in their farming operation by steadily increasing their acreage and rates of production. Eight sons, all adults in 1953, each received college educations or some other vocational training and put their specialized skills to work on the family farm by taking responsibility for particular aspects of the operation. One son oversaw cotton cultivation, another the cattle, and others were similarly specialized in their focus, all “coordinated under Mr. McMillian’s wise management,” according to the *Progressive Farmer*.⁴¹ As the county agent who nominated the McMillians for the award noted that “the whole big family works together as a unit, all members coordinating their efforts in well-organized fashion.”⁴² In this manner, the family built “one of the most modern cotton gins in the state” at a cost of \$70,000.00, along with the requisite storage facilities,

⁴⁰ “The Master Farm Family Record, Clayton Lowder,” 1950, p. 9, 16, Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI

⁴¹ William C. LaRue, “Eight Sons, a Fine Wife, and Fine Neighbors Help a Fine Man,” *The Progressive Farmer* (December, 1950): 19, Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁴² William C. LaRue, “Eight Sons, a Fine Wife, and Fine Neighbors Help a Fine Man,” *The Progressive Farmer* (December, 1950): 19, Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

and also invested in the community freezer locker and a dry cleaning business.⁴³ The E.R. Taylor family of Greenville, S.C., was another such family. They raised peaches and beef cattle, and the center of their enterprise was the peach packing house, where they packed and shipped their own peaches and those of other farms. Earl Taylor followed his interests in marketing into the public arena as chairman of the marketing subcommittee of the Greenville County Agricultural Committee.⁴⁴

All of South Carolina's nearly twenty Master Farm Families of the 1950s practiced agribusiness principles of expansion, mechanization, marketing, and management without any loss of their identification as family farms. This was because progressive farming advocates valued management skills over labor. Family farming depended on some combination of ownership and management with the participation of more than one generation. It did not mean the absence of hired labor or a single-minded focus on crop production alone. Success at progressive commercial farming required a degree of entrepreneurism and a willingness to expand acreage and vertically integrate where appropriate, leading these families to invest in packing houses and cotton gins, feed and seed stores and other retail ventures, and to hire additional labor.

⁴³ William C. LaRue, "Eight Sons, a Fine Wife, and Fine Neighbors Help a Fine Man," *The Progressive Farmer* (December, 1950): 86, Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁴⁴ William C. Lure, "Good Production + Good Marketing = Most Profit," *The Progressive Farmer*, Carolina-Virginia Edition n.d. [1950], p. 19, Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI. These committee was related to the Extension Service. It should not be confused with the ASC committees.

Such expansion was necessary to support growing families and provide livings for adult children who wished to stay on the farm. It was both a business and a family strategy for responding to the agricultural treadmill. Success meant improved standards of living that progressive farming advocates had so relentlessly pursued since the 1920s.

Progressive Farming and Domesticity

The ideologies of progressive farming and domesticity were intertwined, and the Master Farm Families participated fully in the consumer market of the 1950s. Thanks in large part to the New Deal, countryside had been electrified, and farmers put labor saving equipment and appliances to work in all aspects of farm and homemaking possible. Farmers benefited from the rising prices of agricultural commodities in the 1940s, and when manufacturers returned to consumer goods production after the war, rural families of means took advantage of the abundance, just like their urban counterparts. This new rural affluence affected the lives of women and children on commercial farms. These family members had always had the attention of the Extension service, which shifted how it approached the organization and education of these groups. Federal policy makers understood homemaking to be an integral piece of the

progressive farming puzzle, and placed the wife in the role of chief consumer and steward of the home's resources.⁴⁵

Progressive farming advocates stressed the necessity of strong management skills for wives, though they imagined that her use of those skills extended little further from the house than the lawn and flower garden just outside. *Progressive Farmer* features on the Master Farm Families always included an article entitled "Meet the Master Farmer's Wife" that focused exclusively on the wife and the home. Mrs. George McMillion's feature pictured the mother of ten seated at her easel, paint brush in hand. A second showed her at the head of a dining table packed with family, a third inspecting the contents of her freezer alongside her home demonstration agent. Sallie Hill, the author of all of the 1950s "Meet the Master Farmer's Wife" articles, gave much consideration to the chore of providing daily meals for McMillion's large family and

⁴⁵ Historians and cultural anthropologists have extensively studied the changing roles of women on American farms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although they explore many nuances of time, place, commodity and socio-economic status, they all describe a trend in which farm women's work moved into the home and out of the field as both farm and home tasks became more mechanized. They also describe the diminishing role of women's participation in shared work and maintaining reciprocal relationships in rural communities. Deborah Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), and *Open Country, Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition and Change*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986); Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Jones, Lu Ann. *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Sonya Salamon, *Prairie Patrimony: Family, Farming, and Community in the Midwest*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*; Rosenfeld, Rachel Ann Rosenfeld, *Farm Women: Work Farm and Family in the United States*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

wondered, "'How does she get it all done?' . . . Good home management I soon discovered was the answer."⁴⁶

Sallie Hill's articles exalted "good home management" while highlighting the most refined of domestic accomplishments: fancy baking, needle work, flower arrangement, and the fine arts. The point of these photographs was not to obscure the homemaking tasks that McMillian undertook. Instead, they asked the reader to marvel at the management skills that allowed her to pursue feminine hobbies and enjoy the company and admiration of her family. She ran a tight ship and reaped the rewards in leisure and individual pursuits. Describing these women, Hill employed a tone that managed to be both prescriptive and gossipy, all for the benefit of other rural women who might aspire to achieve the status of the Master Farm Family lifestyle – not a life of ease, but of efficiency, purpose, productivity, and community leadership.

Hill's articles showed successful farmers' wives enjoy the rewards of progressive agriculture by stocking their homes with appliances. The kitchen inventories of 1950s South Carolina Master Farm Families included the major brand names and most up-to-date technologies of their time: Singer sewing machines, G.E. washing machines,

⁴⁶ Sallie Hill, "Meet the Master Farmer's Wife -- Mrs. George R. McMillian, Marion County, SC," *Progressive Farmer*, December, 1950, p. 82, Box 110, Folder 8, Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

Frigidaire refrigerators, and Mixmaster electric churns were common.⁴⁷ Master Farmers' wives showed off washing machine in their *Progressive Farmer* photographs and shared recipes for cookies and cakes (always their husbands' "favorites") that involved expensive kitchen equipment. They vacuumed their formal living rooms in their



Both the rug and the homemaker last longer when cleaning is done with a vacuum cleaner. Mrs. Oswald made the lovely slip covers on the sofa.

Figure 12: Sudie Oswald as pictured in the *Progressive Farmer* in recognition of the Master Farm Family Award⁴⁸

⁴⁷ All Master Farm Family nominations list these sorts of appliances, but see for example: "The Master Farm Family Record, Frank W. Atkinson," April 15, 1950; "The Master Farm Family Record, Mr. and Mrs. C.F. Swafford," April 15, 1950; "The Master Farm Family Record, Evan T. Salisbury, May 2, 1950," Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁴⁸ Sallie Hill, "Meet the Master Farmer's Wife: Mrs. Dunbar Oswald, Allendale County, S.C.," *The Progressive Farmer*, June, 1951, p. 79, Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, Box 110, Folder 8, STI. Photo Used with permission. The Progressive Farmer, Copyright 1951; Copyright 2013 Telvent/DTN LLC. All rights reserved.

Sunday best. When quoted in the *Progressive Farmer* they “confessed” that their yards and homes were their “hobby” or their true passion, not actually work at all.⁴⁹ While their husbands were featured for their professional expertise in agricultural and business matters, women were left to show off their success as consumers and their skill at decorative pursuits. These women were domestic managers, not drudges. The women in these narratives they were also absolutely not farmers.

Sally Hill’s articles, with their formulaic structures, adherence to gendered notions of work and consumption, and their intent to convert less “successful” farming families to the ways of modern farming tell only a small part of the story of home and work lives of women on these progressive farms. Cooperative Extension officials and magazine staff collected extensive information on families nominated for the Master Farm Family award that illuminates the great extent to which farm women were involved in the management of their farms as well as their homes. This evidence demonstrates the fallacy of contemporary prescriptive notions that the home was separate from the farm and that successful modern farming excluded women from the daily operations of the farm as both a consequence and a reward of that success. While the *Progressive Farmer* writers ignored this complicated reality in favor of a simpler

⁴⁹ Sallie Hill, "Meet a Master Farmer's Wife -- Mrs. J Tatum Zeigler, Orangeburg County, SC," *The Progressive Farmer*, p. 96, May 1951, Box 110, Folder 8, Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

narrative, the questionnaires and judging forms employed in the Master Farm Family nomination process tells a different story.⁵⁰

The women on South Carolina's master farms were generally college educated, mostly at institutions such as Winthrop College, a liberal arts school in the hills of western South Carolina. Some had professional training as teachers and nurses. Like their husbands, they boasted impressive lists of community and political activities. They were members of their county chapters of the Farm Bureau or the Grange, auxiliary members of the American Legion and sometimes members of Daughters of the Confederacy. They were Sunday school teachers, missionary society presidents, and PTA and garden club members. They sat on county Extension committees, led their Home Demonstration Clubs and their children's 4-H chapters.⁵¹ As such, they were leaders in their community's social, civic, and religious organizations in their own right, even as their activities complemented those of their husbands.

⁵⁰ These nomination booklets are fascinating for both the nature of the questions they asked and the way that the families who filled them out managed to circumvent the forms' structure when they wished to tell a different story. Some questions were explicitly gendered, such as when asking for biographical details of individual family members, the fields were labeled "farmer" and "wife." The designers did not image that "wife" could also be "farmer." For other questions the gendering is more subtle. The grouping of questions regarding crops together and separate from distinct categories measuring the efforts at energy conservation in home making tasks implied gendered divisions of labor and responsibility. Nevertheless, women did not keep their answers confined to the questions that were supposed to be the domain of the wife.

⁵¹ See these applications for selected examples: "The Master Farm Family Record, Evans T. Salisbury," May 2, 1950, Box 110, Folder 8; "The Master Farm Family Record, Clayton Lowder," n.d. [1950], Box 110, Folder 8; "The Master Farm Family Record, George B. Patrick," 1953, Box 110, Folder 9; "The Master Farm Family Record, Mr. & Mrs. James B. Guess, Jr.," 1953, Box 110, Folder 9, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, STI. On the educations and economic status of commercial farm wives in South Carolina prior to World War II, see Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm*, 229-235.

At home they shouldered the responsibility of kitchen gardens of an acre or more. Master Farm Family candidates opened their pantries, freezers, and smoke houses to Extension officials and magazines representatives to demonstrate their stockpiles of canned goods and frozen and cured meat, usually all produced on the farm. They shared their monthly grocery bills and discussed their systems of home book keeping. Some women boasted that they did all of this without paid help in the house, but most of these women likely did have the assistance of employees.⁵² The use of hired help in the home was absent from the Master Farm Family nomination booklets. Those who mentioned domestic help, or the lack of it, did so unprompted.

To completely fulfill the demands of model family status, farm wives had to possess some technological knowledge as well as homemaking skills. They demonstrated their knowledge of horticulture by reporting the planting, fertilizing, and pest control routines they used in their flower and vegetable gardens.⁵³ It was not sufficient to simply possess an electric range, automatic dishwasher, or vacuum cleaner. A wife in a Master Farm Family must know how to use them in the most energy efficient manner. Their choice of furnishings, room use, and landscaping were not simply

⁵² The Master Farm Family applications asked specifically about wage, tenant, and family labor on the farm, but there were no questions about household help.

⁵³ Sallie Hill, "Meet the Master Farmer's Wife -- Mrs. W. Hugh McGee, Anderson County, S.C.," *The Progressive Farmer*, September 1950, Box 110, Folder 8, Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

matters of practicality and taste; they were scientific problems with correct solutions determined by home economics. While availed of modern appliances, the Master Farm Family wives strived for and maintained standards of homemaking efficiency, attractiveness, and cleanliness never before imagined on a daily basis in rural homes.

Maintaining those standards was not, as answers to the Master Farm Family questionnaire shows, a task separate from the efficient and profitable operation of a progressive farm. Instead, the wives' good management of their homes was integral to the management of their farms. Of course, farm women's embrace of modern house-keeping was important to progressive farming advocates, regardless of the family's affluence or land tenure status. Tenant farm wives had been required to join home demonstration clubs North Carolina's tenancy improvement scheme, and homemakers' work was essential to when a family applied for an FHA loan.⁵⁴ At its best, the Master Farm provided "sufficient income . . . for family living in keeping with a desirable quality of living . . . the farm and home, *as a unit*, must serve as a good demonstration of successful farm and house planning and operation, and indicate the use of up-to-date teachings of the Land Grant College and other reliable sources of information."⁵⁵ For the Master Farm Family wife, her home and garden represented the combination of

⁵⁴ See chapter 4.

⁵⁵ "Requirements for a Master Farm Family," Box 110, Folder 7, Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

consumer activity, business savvy, and commercial agricultural achievement, to which her efforts were invaluable.

The questionnaires also demonstrate that the wives of master farmers were integrated in the operations of the farm. Mrs. Manly McClure, whose farm originated with land and resources she brought to the marriage, discussed the improvement of their farm land and the expansion of their holdings as a shared achievement in which she participated fully. "In 1924, we moved back to my old home as renters. Years later by degrees we begun [sic] to buy a few acres close around and finally ended up with 910 acres. These run down eroded acres, have been correctly terraced, and with the rotation of crops, diversified farming, and excellent cooperation by extension and soil conservation service these straw fields and gullies are now some of our best fields."⁵⁶ After describing her farm's other achievements, including both the enlargement of their cattle herd and the improvement of their house, first constructed by her father, McClure concluded that "hard-work and persistence will add up to a little if you stick with it long enough."⁵⁷ She took pride in and credit for all of these accomplishments, just as she also took pride in the household appliances that were the *Progressive Farmer's* exclusive

⁵⁶ "Master Farm Family Record, Mr. and Mrs. Manly McClure," 1953, unnumbered insert between pages 9 and 10, Series 32, Box 110, Folder 9, Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, STI.

⁵⁷ "Master Farm Family Record, Mr. and Mrs. Manly McClure," 1953, unnumbered insert between pages 9 and 10, Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

interest when it featured the McClure farm in its December, 1953 issue.⁵⁸ On this Master Farm, the farmer's wife was a full business partner.⁵⁹ McClure was not alone. Mrs. Earle R. Taylor told the *Progressive Farmer* that her home appliances freed her from time-consuming house work and allowed her to take on more responsibility in the peach packing house.⁶⁰ John and Mattie Gaston took pains to point out that their farm was a "husband-wife partnership" and that they intended to include their only child, Martha, when she reached adulthood.⁶¹

In spite of wives' significant involvement in farm operations, not all Master Farm Families were so sure of their daughters' futures on the farm. When asked how they included their children in farm planning, Clifford and Helen Smith said that they made decisions about the farm together as a couple. While they "discussed [plans] before the children, their ideas sought and evaluated [and] considered," the children were "too small to have much voice in making plans." As for their future inclusion, the Smiths stated that there were "no boys in [the] family," and that the daughters were "not of

⁵⁸ Sallie Hill, "Meet the Master Farmer's Wife -- Mrs. Manley McClure, Anderson County, SC," Box 110, Folder 9, *Progressive Farmer*, Dec 1953, Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁵⁹ "Master Farm Family Record, Mr. and Mrs. Manly McClure," 1953, unnumbered insert between pages 9 and 10, Box 110, Folder 9, Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁶⁰ Sallie Hill, "Meet the Master Farmer's Wife -- Mrs. Earle R. Taylor, Greenville County, SC," *The Progressive Farmer*, October 1950 Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, Box 110, Folder 8, STI, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina.

⁶¹ J. W. Gaston, Jr, Master Farm Family Record, 1953, p. 6, Box 110, Folder 9, Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

age.”⁶² While two of the three daughters were quite young, the oldest was in tenth grade. At this age, many such families were already planning for sons to form partnerships with their fathers after graduation. Instead, Sylvia Smith had plans to attend Winthrop College to pursue her interest in journalism.⁶³

Young Sylvia’s ambitions differed little from the daughters of other Master Farm Families in the 1950s. The community involvement, extra-curricular activities, and college educations made possible by their parents’ prosperity took them away from the farm at greater rates than their brothers. The family of George and Ester Patrick, a 1953 Master Farm Family from Orangeburg County, South Carolina had two daughters. Both women were college educated and had been 4-H members with extensive lists of accomplishments and leadership positions among their peers. They married urban professionals and were no longer involved in farming. The oldest son, with an equally impressive resume and a degree in voice from the University of South Carolina had returned to “farming in partnership with [his] father.” His younger brother, a high school senior, intended to do the same.⁶⁴ The Patrick sons, like the sons of other progressive farming families, would have been groomed for the job from

⁶² “Master Farm Family Record, Clifford T. Smith,” 1953, p. 6, Box 110, Folder 9, Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁶³ “Master Farm Family Record, Clifford T. Smith,” 1953, p. 5, Box 110, Folder 9, Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁶⁴ “Master Farm Family Record, George B. Patrick,” 1953, pp. 5-6, Box 110, Folder 9, Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

childhood, in the club projects and short courses available through the Extension service and land grant colleges, as well as experience helping on the farm.⁶⁵ H.C. and Helen Coward hoped that their sons' 4-H projects would keep them interested in the partnerships they planned to offer them when they were older.⁶⁶ Tom Salisbury had a similar experience. At age twenty-three in 1950, he had three and half years of agricultural college education and farmed in partnership with his father.⁶⁷

Master Farm Family sons worked in order to learn and to earn personal savings and income, not because their families depended on their labor. Many of their children received cash allowances for their work and put the profits and prizes from 4-H projects into personal savings.⁶⁸ The Salisbury family shared an interest in sports, maintained a basketball court in their yard, and took annual vacations to the mountains.⁶⁹ The Lowder sons played on baseball and football teams and were YMCA members, and most other adolescent sons of Master Farm Families also found time for competitive

⁶⁵ "The Master Farm Family Record, Clayton Lowder," n.d. [1950], p. 4, Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁶⁶ "The Master Farm Family Record, H.C. Coward," n.d. [1953], Box 110, Folder 9, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁶⁷ His father, Evans Salisbury, inherited the farm from his father, and had purchased additional land in the 22 years since then. "The Master Farm Family Record, Evans T. Salisbury," May 2, 1960, p. 3, Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁶⁸ "The Master Farm Family Record, Evans T. Salisbury," May 2, 1960, p. 4, Box 110, Folder 8; "The Master Farm Family Record, Clayton Lowder," n.d. [1950], p. 4, Box 110, Folder 8; "The Master Farm Family Record, H.C. Coward," n.d. [1953], Box 110, Folder 9, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁶⁹ "The Master Farm Family Record, Evans T. Salisbury," May 2, 1960, p. 5, Box 110, Folder 8, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

sports.⁷⁰ These families employed wage laborers and tenants, whose work, along with adult family members, meant that childhood on successful progressive farms, for boys and girls alike, was for school and extra-curricular activities, punctuated with chores and projects. Like their mothers, they no longer engaged in drudgery. Instead they were training for progressive farm management and middle-class living.

Farming at the Margins

Developing and maintaining this rural middle-class was the ultimate goal of progressive farming advocates and policy makers. They portrayed the process as one of social improvement in which rural communities were strengthened by rising incomes, better managed tenancy arrangements, and the improved quality of life for rural women and children. The narrative of progress obscured the losses of smaller farms. It failed to recognize the ways in which farm programs underserved or actively discriminated against the portion of the farming population that could not attain ideal progressive farming white, middle class success.

The Master Farm Families accounted for very few of the farming families in the Carolinas. The vast majority of these farms were smaller, less prosperous, and, according to policy makers at least, less efficient. The lower value the USDA and the

⁷⁰ “The Master Farm Family Record, Clayton Lowder,” n.d. [1950], p. 4, Box 110; “The Master Farm Family Record, Rhett M. McGregor,” n.d. [1953], Box 110, Folder 9, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

U.S. generally government placed on these farms was plainly evident in the implementation of the draft during World War II. According to an assistant secretary of agriculture in 1950, farm workers on larger commercial farmers were drafted at lower rates than those from smaller farms. "Deferment policies . . . were administered for a part of the war period on the basis of war unit criteria with respect of farm size. This operated in the direction of more deferment of farm workers of military age on the more productive and large size farms. Conversely, males of military age and inadequate-sized farms failed to meet the deferment criteria in greater proportions."⁷¹ Small farms would contend with a host of policies and implementation strategies that continued to cast their efforts as inadequate.

North Carolina was dotted with many very small farms in the 1950s. While North Carolina's average farm size increased to approximately eighty-four acres by 1956, the national average reached two hundred forty-one acres and continued to grow at a faster rate than North Carolina's farms. Further, the state saw an increase in the number of part time farmers, those who received a significant portion of their income from off-farm sources.⁷² In 1954, 56 percent of North Carolina farms reported some off-

⁷¹ K.T. Hutchinson to Lindley Beckworth, January 24, 1950, Box 1843, Folder "1950 Employment - Farm Program, Employment 1-1- Agricultural," RG 16, NARA.

⁷² David Weaver, "The Overall Extension Program and Significant Changes and Trends in Agriculture," [draft] May 1956, p. 12, Box 1, Folder 7, David Stathem Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, NCSU.

farm income and on twenty-seven percent of farms, off-farm income surpassed the value of farm products sold.⁷³

North Carolina's pattern of industrialization also contributed to the abundance of part-time farms in the state. Extension officials saw the characteristics of the textile industry as a significant contributing factor. In the unstable textile industry, factories sat idle for days or weeks at a time, which made it not only possible, but desirable and even necessary for textile workers to supplement their incomes with farm production.⁷⁴ Patterns of decentralized industrial development allowed mostly white rural workers to earn cash wages while maintaining their connections to rural communities and continue to participate in farm work.

Policy makers and farm program administrators of the 1950s saw North Carolina's abundance of small, low-income farms as detrimental to the state's economy and its competitive position for farm production and industrial development relative to other farm states. Policy makers believed part-time farms to be inefficient producers who struggled with high production costs, low returns, and poor quality produce. At

⁷³ David Weaver, "The Overall Extension Program and Significant Changes and Trends in Agriculture," [draft] May 1956, pp.8, 12, Box 1, Folder 7, David Stathem Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, NCSU.

⁷⁴ David Weaver, "The Overall Extension Program and Significant Changes and Trends in Agriculture," [draft] May 1956, p. 13, Box 1, Folder 7, David Stathem Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, NCSU. On the textile industry in North and South Carolina, see Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd, James Leloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones, and Christopher B. Daly. *Like a Family: Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

best the prevalence of part-time farms was a temporary condition, and at worst they were a reflection of North Carolina's lagging progress in farm modernization. North Carolina's director of Extension, David Weaver, believed that "this part-time farming is excellent in many respects, particularly as it serves as a transition device from true commercial farming to complete off-farm employment. It is inevitable that this change will take place sooner or later." Part-time farming must only be a transitional phase, Weaver believed, because it was not "conducive to the best conservation practices," nor to the mechanization that would promote efficient and profitable commercial farming.⁷⁵

An ASC tobacco division chief recommended part-time farming as a transitional strategy for a small farmer in Wayne County, NC. Paul Parks wrote the Secretary of Agriculture to explain that shrinking allotments and rising land values were driving him out of business. "I own a small farm, about 21 acres [of] cleared land," Parks wrote. "I had 5.1 [acres of] tobacco when I bought the farm. Now I have a tobacco allotment of 2.89 [acres]. I just cannot make a living on it now." Unable to rent additional tobacco land to increase his productive capacity, he turned to his local committee. "I have tried the get the committees in my county to raise my allotment, they said there is nothing they can do," Parks explained. The head of the ASCS tobacco division upheld the

⁷⁵ David Weaver, "The Overall Extension Program and Significant Changes and Trends in Agriculture," [draft] May 1956, p. 13, Box 1, Folder 7, David Stathem Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, NCSU.

committee's ruling and suggested that Parks find some off-farm work to increase his income.⁷⁶

In the endeavor to increase farm sizes, allotments proved troublesome for policy makers and very small farmers. To some extent allotments, especially the very small allotments that some flue-cured tobacco farmers possessed, both necessitated and supported part time farming. Allotments guaranteed access to the regulated market, but for many that access was too limited to provide adequate income. Therefore, tiny allotments created these part-time famers. In response, David Weaver proposed policy revisions that would allow for the transfer to allotments from very small farms to the larger commercial farms in their area. He saw this transfer as necessary to a community's economic development, as it would facilitate the further efficient production of commodities while freeing up the smallest farmers for other opportunities. "As an important part of these area redevelopment programs, the government should make possible the transfer of small production allotment and should establish criteria for encouraging their consolidation on efficient family farms."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Joe. R. Williamson to Paul Y. Parks, May 6, 1960, Box 9, Folder "May 1960," RG 145, NARA. Parks was not the only disappointed established or aspiring tobacco farmer in Wayne County that year. The committee administered 3064 tobacco allotments, amounting to more than fourteen thousand acres. But in 1960, the committee granted no allotment expansions and rejected seven applications – all that they received – from individuals wishing to start growing tobacco. See, "Wayne County ASC Highlights" p. 20, Box 5, Folder "Reports, May 1961," RG145, NARA.

⁷⁷ David S. Weaver, "The Challenge – Teamwork Approach to Agricultural Problems in North Carolina" [draft], p. 19, Box 1, Folder 6, David Stathem Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, NCSU.

While allotments allowed small famers to hang onto their place in the market, their grip grew tenuous as the allotments shrank every year. Farmers sent pleas for allotment increases to their county committees, their Congressional delegations, the Secretary of Agriculture, and even the President. A Virginia farmer explained his plight to Dwight Eisenhower in August, 1960. "We are writing now to ask if you will please help to get more tobacco allotment. . . . We have not even a half acre." The McKinneys lived in Jetersville, Virginia, where, they told the president, there were no jobs other than farming. So desperate were the McKinney's circumstances that they had been required to mortgage their home to bury their son the year before, and now faced foreclosure. An acre and a half or two acres of tobacco would greatly improve their situation, they explained to Eisenhower.⁷⁸ A Clinton, North Carolina, farmer wrote to Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman in 1963 after learning that allotments would be reduced in 1964. "I understand that we are in for another cut in tobacco. I only have 86 one hundredths [of an acre allotment.] If it is cut much more I will be completely out of tobacco. There is lots more in the same shape I am in. The little farmers will soon be completely out of tobacco and their homes. The larger will have it all, the ones that are able to buy up people's tobacco allotments."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Mr. and Mrs. T. W. McKinnly to Dwight D. Eisenhower, Aug. 21, 1960, Box 9, Folder "Tobacco 15-1, Aug 1960," RG145, NARA.

⁷⁹ Unknown to Orville Freeman, November 14, 1963, Box 13, RG 145.7, NARA.

With allotments shrinking and small farmers finding it difficult to amass large enough allotments and marketing quotas to make a sufficient living, applications by new farmers to receive allotments for the first time often met rejection. Frustrated applicants critiqued the gatekeeping function of the county committees and the allotments they administered, arguing that the entire system was unfair and served only to protect larger commercial farms. Mrs. Frank Day, of Elkfork, Kentucky, writing to the Secretary of Agriculture on her husband's behalf, expressed outrage at the system and those who benefited at her expense. Her husband, a World War I veteran, had failed to meet the requirements for a new grower tobacco allotment. Day found it infuriating that in spite of her husband's military service, "now he doesn't have Freedom [to let] him have a base on his farm when so many other men around is getting rich with such big bases because they was fortunate enough to have money to buy up farms with base."⁸⁰ Her husband fought for freedom, but, Day confided in the Secretary, he saw little of that freedom in the allotment system. He maintained that "if Russia has any laws any rottener than this one he'd like to see it."⁸¹

⁸⁰ Mrs. Frank Day to Ezra Taft Benson, Sept. 2 1960, Box 9, Folder "Tobacco 15-1, Sep 1960," RG 145, NARA. Recall from chapter 1 that "base" is the established production history of a plot of land, in reference to which committees made yearly determinations about allotments.

⁸¹ Mrs. Frank Day to Ezra Taft Benson, Sept. 2 1960, Box 9, Folder "Tobacco 15-1, Sep 1960," RG 145, NARA.

Nearly all famers who wrote to Washington officials seeking modest, even tiny, increases in their tobacco and cotton allotments reasoned that, among all the millions of acres of their given commodity grown in the country, the few additional acres they requested would pose little administrative problem or contribute to the surplus conditions allotments were supposed to combat. Surely, they asserted, some allowance could be made for the small additions. Yet the very modesty of these applicants' ambitions proved detrimental to their claims. The ASC and the Extension Service actively pursued a policy of consolidating small farms and encouraging these families to find other work. Any further enabling of struggling small-scale producers to persevere was antithetical to their goals.

Families without the means to acquire more land, and the allotments that went with it, in such constrained circumstances that even a little more production would mean a great deal, were exactly the famers that policy makers sought to exclude. Small famers understood that the continued growth of neighboring full-time commercial farms, and the further deterioration of their own circumstances, was not simply a function of the market that favored efficiency and economies of scale. Policies that favored larger progressive farms actively worked to drive the small scale producer out of business. Tobacco division chief Joe Williams was unusually explicit on this point in a 1960 letter in which he reasoned with a rejected new allotment applicant that, "You

will probably understand that regular tobacco producers wish to keep the requirements rather strict because the tobacco allotments for their own farms have been considerably reduced, partly due to the extra production on new farms.”⁸² Seldom were USDA officials so candid about the gate-keeping aspects of commodity allotment programs.

For tenant farmers, shrinking allotments meant that they were pushed from the land in a process resembling a game of musical chairs. As landowners had fewer allotment acres to rent, tenants competed for a smaller pool of available land. Those who lost their leases because their allotments were gone often left their homes seeking other farms to rent. Some years the specific provisions of a given commodity program remained in flux through the winter, leaving landlords and tenants alike uncertain about their arrangements for the coming year. I.O. Schaub described the problem to North Carolina Senator Frank Porter Graham when development of the specifics of the 1950 cotton program was delayed. It was certain that allotments would be smaller than in 1949, but by how much remained unclear. The situation would, he explained,

affect a larger number [of people] since there will be many tenants displaced from the larger farms; and it remains to be seen as to just what these people can do. Reports from some of our field men today indicate that in our main cotton counties there is a greater movement of tenants than for many years. The first of January is moving day, and at the moment there is much confusion. Reports indicate that the better tenants will in the main get placed without too much

⁸² Joe R. Williams to Mrs. Frank Day, Sept. 23, 1960, Box 9, Folder “Tobacco 15-1, Sep 1960,” RG 145, NARA.

difficulty. Poorer grade tenants will undoubtedly have quite a problem in getting placed on a farm.

Schaub saw little chance that these displaced tenants would find non-farm employment locally, and anticipated they would seek public assistance instead.⁸³ This pattern continued until tenancy all but disappeared by the 1960s.

As small farmers endured the process of being slowly squeezed from the farm economy, they found little help from the Extension service. This was especially true for part-time farmers, who were more difficult to reach, were in need of different kinds of information and aid, and were working toward different goals than full-time commercial farmers.⁸⁴ The methods that Extension workers used to reach the farm community, such as week-day community meetings and demonstrations, were ill-suited to the needs of individuals who also held factory jobs and therefore had less flexibility in their work-day schedules. David Weaver, while applying to Extension officials in Washington for funds to develop programs targeted to part-time farmers, acknowledged that “many of our county agents have felt that they had little or no responsibility to part-time farmers and, hence, devoted most of their efforts to full-time

⁸³ I.O. Schaub to Frank P. Graham, Jan 3, 1950, Box 10, Folder “G, 1948-1950,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁸⁴ David S. Weaver to C.M. Ferguson, July 28, 1954, Box 19, Folder “D.S. Weaver, 1953-1955,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

farm families.”⁸⁵ Indeed, county agents focused their efforts on the most prosperous and most influential farmers in the community in a system one anthropologist has called “practical favoritism.”⁸⁶ Wilson County’s extension agent during the 1950s explained that he strategically chose to work with the “decision makers” among the farm community – land owners and highly respected tenants – who could demonstrate the effectiveness of Extension sponsored techniques and sway their neighbors, through example and discussion, to attempt the same.⁸⁷

In general, Extension officials and farm program administrators blamed the difficulties faced by low-income and part time farmers on their own recalcitrance rather than on a system of farm support that was unsympathetic, and often totally blind, to their needs. The November, 1951, North Carolina Extension-issued “Statement of the Situation and Problems Affecting North Carolina Farms, Homes and Communities in 1952” outlined the farm situation of the 1940s and early 1950s. It acknowledged the challenges posed by increasing out-migration from the rural areas of the state, the

⁸⁵ David S. Weaver to C.M. Ferguson, July 28, 1954, Box 19, Folder “D.S. Weaver, 1953-1955,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁸⁶ Peter Benson, *Tobacco Capitalism: Growers, Migrant Workers, and the Changing Face of a Global Industry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012): 91.

⁸⁷ Peter Benson, *Tobacco Capitalism: Growers, Migrant Workers, and the Changing Face of a Global Industry*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012): 91. The literature on problematic methods of the Extension Service is extensive. For examples see Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Debra Reid, *Reaping a Great Harvest: African Americans, the Extension Service and Rural Reform in Jim Crow Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007).

disruptions in family labor caused by the war, and the detrimental effects of inflation on farm income in the era.⁸⁸ But it also placed the blame for poor living conditions and low farm incomes squarely on the shoulders of low income farmers, the “majority” of whom “[fail] to take full advantage of their opportunities in making the best use of their resources,” and who used their income in inefficient ways.⁸⁹ The report castigated farming families who did not produce food crops, large gardens, and livestock for their own consumption and for cash sale (failing to “live at home” in the old 1920s and 1930s terminology), and who spent their limited cash on grocery goods. The report gave no attention to the reasons for these families’ choices, which included the terms of tenancy arrangements or the inability to spare family labor for the work necessary to maintain extensive gardens and livestock.⁹⁰ Instead, officials encouraged discipline and restraint, urging families to set priorities and objectives within their reach and adjust their production and spending behaviors accordingly.⁹¹

⁸⁸ “Statement of the Situation and Problems Affecting North Carolina Farms, Homes and Communities in 1952,” pp. 1-4, Box 2, Folder 9, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Assistant Director Records, 1907-1978, NCSU.

⁸⁹ Statement of the Situation and Problems Affecting North Carolina Farms, Homes and Communities in 1952,” p. 1, Box 2, Folder 9, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Assistant Director Records, 1907-1978, NCSU.

⁹⁰ Statement of the Situation and Problems Affecting North Carolina Farms, Homes and Communities in 1952,” p. 3, Box 2, Folder 9, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Assistant Director Records, 1907-1978, NCSU.

⁹¹ Statement of the Situation and Problems Affecting North Carolina Farms, Homes and Communities in 1952,” p. 5, Box 2, Folder 9, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Assistant Director Records, 1907-1978, NCSU. See also David S. Weaver to Clarence Poe, January 10, 1956, p. 1,

Part-time farmers had two choices in the view of administrators and policy makers at NC State and other land grant colleges. Either they should commit to full-time, commercial farming or stop farming entirely. This preference drove the decisions that Extensions leaders and land grant college deans made when allocating their resources and determining which farmers to assist. At a 1957 conference of Extension officials and deans of the schools of agriculture in the major land grant colleges, speakers such as C. B. Ratchford, voiced frank opinions about small, part time or “in-between farmers.” The task for his audience was to encourage these families to either invest fully in efficient commercial agriculture, or to cease farming, and to support them in that choice through education and other aid. Ratchford asserted that the age of the “in-between” farmer was ending. “Those in the in-between group who do not make a decision to move in one direction or the other will become essentially welfare cases in the future.”⁹² Continuing his remarks, Ratchford explained these farmers would continue to fall behind because their backwardness and unwillingness to adapt revealed their own failures of character. “If the general economic conditions continue good and if

Box 14, Folder “P, 1948-1959,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁹² C. B. Ratchford, “N.C. Agriculture of the Future: What it will be Like and How We Can Serve It,” 1957, p. 18, Box 3, Unlabeled folder, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

our efforts with this group are successful, the number of in-between farmers will be sharply reduced. In fact, all that should be left eventually is a group who are really incapable of making much of a contribution in any place in our economy. At that time, we should help get them recognized publicly as the welfare cases that they really are and at that time redirect our efforts to commercial farmers and to other groups.”⁹³

Even as federal allotment policies restricted allotments, preventing very small farms from achieving modestly larger scale production, other policies discouraged the development of community resources that might have aided these farmers in sharing risks and expenses. Progressive commercial farmers aggressively forged an independence from each other, encouraged and financed by readily available credit from the government and from private lenders. Farming communities moved away from the culture of shared work and resources that exemplified earlier agrarian reform movements and the cooperative ethos of the associationalist period.⁹⁴ For instance, many farms built private crop storage facilities with the help of government financing.

Agricultural economists of the Depression era identified inadequate storage facilities as a key reason why growers sold their crops soon after harvest when the wide

⁹³ C. B. Ratchford, “N.C. Agriculture of the Future: What it will be Like and How We Can Serve It,” p. 19, Box 3, Unlabeled folder, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁹⁴ Historians, especially historians of rural women, have studied the transition from a shared work culture in farm communities to more independent and isolated work made possible by mechanization before World War II and the manner in which this affected the work of farm women.. See Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, and Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm*.

spread availability of farm commodities resulted in the lowest market prices of the cycle for those goods. Properly equipped and weather-tight grain bins, silos, and barns allowed farmers to hold crops off the market, awaiting the end of the post-harvest glut and to grow and store more of their own livestock feed (or to time feed purchases to the most advantageous markets). Such storage was also necessary to qualify for CCC loans. A 1954 Extension service pamphlet on grain storage advertised the advantages of private storage. Grain storage would pay for itself, the pamphlet informed readers, by allowing farmers to take advantage of higher prices and tax write-offs.⁹⁵ Developing crop drying, storage, and transportation resources amounted to the building of a private agricultural infrastructure.⁹⁶

The USDA issued loans specifically for crop drying and storage facilities for up to eighty percent of the cost of new equipment and buildings through local ASC office.⁹⁷ Individual farmers provided the remaining portion, either through privately obtained credit or from farm cash resources. The ASC issued loans for other infrastructural purchases such as permanent irrigation systems, and thus financed significant

⁹⁵ "More Dollars with More Storage," NC Agricultural Extension Service, 1954, Box 6, Folder "Circular Letters, Jan-June, 1954," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁹⁶ Robert N. Collender and Steven R. Koenig, "The Role of Federal Credit Programs," Marvin Duncan and Jerome M. Stam, eds., *Financing Agriculture in the Twenty-first Century*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 144-145.

⁹⁷ 1956 loans in NC: 4 years, 4% interest, up to 80% of the construction cost "More Dollars with More Storage," NC Agricultural Extension Service, 1954, Box 6, Folder "Circular Letters, Jan-June, 1954," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

investments in farm facilities⁹⁸ While these resources made investment in land and private infrastructural improvements possible on farms that could meet the minimal down payment obligations, the poorest farmers found even this out of their reach. Cooperative facilities might have provided an answer to this problem, but these same programs provided strong disincentives to cooperative investment.

The Farm Credit Administration did include a network of banks that lent solely to agricultural cooperatives, but the easily available credit for erecting storage structures encouraged individual farms in the Carolinas to invest in their own private facilities. As a result, many communities lacked any cooperative storage or marketing enterprises. An Edisto, South Carolina, Master Farmer nominee explained that he was not a member of any cooperatives because there were no cooperatives in his county to join. The cooperative ventures that might have helped small farmers compete in the growing agribusiness economy that encouraged bigness often never materialized because the wealthier farmers in the community, such this Edisto Master Farmer, had no need to contribute to their development. The farmers with the most resources – either in assets or creditworthiness – had little incentive for cooperative action when they possessed the wherewithal to act individually. Therefore, while federal credit provided opportunities

⁹⁸ “More Dollars with More Storage,” NC Agricultural Extension Service, 1954, Box 6, Folder “Circular Letters, Jan-June, 1954,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

of land and homeownership that would have been beyond the means of many poorer farmers, federal lending policies favored large individual investments that reinforced the success of commercial farming enterprises while discouraging development of institutions that could have supported smaller farms.

Black farmers faced even higher obstacles when they turned to their county committees and local agency offices for help. In 1997, two class action law suits brought national attention to the history of discrimination these minority farmers encountered in farm programs, and the suit specifically complained of unfair treatment and delayed service from the county committees of the ASC and FHA.⁹⁹ While the law suit restricted itself to complaints between 1981 and 1996, the plaintiffs and their advocates told of a long history of discrimination.¹⁰⁰ The opinion of the court, issued in 1999, cited this history when authorizing a settlement in which the USDA agreed to compensate the claimants. “For decades . . . the Department of Agriculture and the county commissioners discriminated against African American farmers when they denied, delayed or otherwise frustrated the applications of those farmers for farm loans and other credit and benefit programs . . . These events were the culmination of a string of

⁹⁹ Tadlock Cowan and Jody Feder, “The *Pigford* Cases: USDA Settlement of Discrimination Suits by Black Farmers,” Congressional Research Service report RS20430, (March 12, 2013), p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Tadlock Cowan and Jody Feder, “The *Pigford* Cases: USDA Settlement of Discrimination Suits by Black Farmers,” Congressional Research Service report RS20430, (March 12, 2013), p. 1; Consent Decree, *Timothy C. Pigford, et al. v. Dan Glickman*, Civil Action 97-1978 (PLF) and *Cecil Brewington, et. al. v. Dan Glickman*, Civil Action 98-1693 (PLF), April 14, 1999, <http://www.dcd.uscourts.gov/pigfordmonitor/orders/19990414consent.pdf> (accessed April 27, 2013), p. 5.

broken promises that had been made to African American famers for well over a century.”¹⁰¹ The opinion linked the long-standing discrimination against black farmers by USDA programs and their local committees, to a precipitous decline in the number of black farmers in the United States since the beginning of the New Deal, from 925,000 in 1920 to 18,000 in 1992.¹⁰²

In the 1950s, farm progress farm policy makers began to articulate and pursue a policy that had been the logical conclusion of their approach all along. In order to raise the average income of southern farmers, there would need to be fewer farms in the South. Over the course of the 1950s, average farm income was on the rise in North Carolina because so too was the size of the state’s farms. North Carolina had nearly the smallest average farm size in the South in 1950, but both Carolinas experienced significant concentration of farm land in the ensuing decade and a related decline in tenancy. North Carolina had 33.94% fewer individual farms in 1959 than in 1950 while South Carolina lost 43.9% of its farms. But in the same period, total farm acres under cultivation in both states fell by less than one half of one percent. (See Table 4.)

¹⁰¹ *Timothy C. Pigford, et al. v. Dan Glickman*, Civil Action 97-1978 (PLF) and *Cecil Brewington, et. al. v. Dan Glickman*, Civil Action 98-1693 (PLF), April 14, 1999, p. 3, <http://www.dcd.uscourts.gov/pigfordmonitor/orders/19990414op.pdf> (April 27, 2013).

¹⁰² *Timothy C. Pigford, et al. v. Dan Glickman*, Civil Action 97-1978 (PLF) and *Cecil Brewington, et. al. v. Dan Glickman*, Civil Action 98-1693 (PLF), April 14, 1999, p. 8, <http://www.dcd.uscourts.gov/pigfordmonitor/orders/19990414op.pdf> (April 27, 2013). For a detailed analysis of how post-war discrimination against African-American farmers drove such farmers off the land, see Pete Daniel, *Dispossession: Discrimination Against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights*,” (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

Table 4: Farm Concentration in North Carolina and South Carolina, 1950-1959¹⁰³

	1950			1959		
	NC	SC	National	NC	SC	National
Number of Farms	288,508	139,364	5,388,437	190,567	78,172	3,710,503
Acres Cultivated	31,422,080	19,395,2000		31,402,880	19,374,080	
Average Farm Size (acres)	67	85.2	240	83.4	117	310

In such an environment, it was little wonder that the politics of parity and the price-cost squeeze resonated so well with Carolinas farmers. But when they looked to the consumer for the source of their trouble, they looked to the wrong place. The farm

¹⁰³ All figures taken from the 1959 Census of Agriculture. “North Carolina, State Table 1. – Farms, Acreage, and Value: Censuses of 1920 -1959,” <<http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/AgCensusImages/1959/01/26/865/Table-01.pdf>> (August 29, 2012); “South Carolina, State Table 1. – Farms, Acreage, And Value: Censuses of 1920-1959,” *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1959*, Vol. 1, Part 27, South Carolina, p. 3, <<http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/AgCensusImages/1959/01/27/865/Table-01.pdf>> (August 29, 2012); national figures: <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/AgCensusImages/1959/02/05/909/Table-02.pdf> (August 29, 2012). A farm, for the purposes of the 1950 Census of Agriculture, was defined as 1) a place (excluding home and gardens) that produced agricultural products valuing at least \$150.00 in 1949 or 2) if the farm did not exist or experienced crop failure in 1949, the farm could be expected to produce \$150.00 in farm produce in 1950 or 3) the residents of a place considered themselves to be operating a farm, regardless of whether not it met production targets set out in numbers 1 and 2. A farm was considered a single entity for census purposes if under the control of a single individual or partnership, whether through ownership, lease, or sharecropping arrangement. Ray Hurley, “Introduction,” *Counties and State Economic Areas, North and South Carolina, United States Census of Agriculture: 1950*, Vol. 1, Part 16, (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1952), p. XII <http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/Historical_Publications/1950/vol1%20North%20South%20Carolina/41656297v1p16.pdf> (August 29, 2012).

programs that stabilized the market also slowly, inexorably, narrowed the farm population to a few commercial farmers who fit the progressive farming mold.

Conclusion

Progressive farm policy makers were committed to the idea of the family farm, however restrictive their notions of such farms happened to be. They support those farms that fit the mold or demonstrated potential to do so. When David Weaver and others spoke of the necessity of the family farmer to the health of American democracy, it was these farmers he had in mind, not the supposedly unambitious potential welfare clients that were the in-between farmers, the increasingly obsolete tenants, and black farmers. Progressive farming advocates came to embrace, more clearly than ever before, the idea that agriculture was compatible with middle class living only in an economy with many fewer farms. Industrialized farming required economies of scale that were incompatible with a society of very small farms.

Committees and agency personnel decided who was and was not a farmer when they assigned or denied acreage allotments and marketing quotas. Small farms, part-time farmers, and minority owned farms had no place in this calculus. Policy makers used the power of the state to deny or restrict allotments or credit and remove incentives for cooperation. Their problems ranked low on the priority list of the Extension service, which explicitly favored commercial farmers and segregated the Extension work force.

Rules guided their decision. But they interpreted and implemented these rules with reference to culturally informed notions of what a successful family farm looked like. This idea was grounded in the goals of pre-Depression Extension officials and rural sociologists who lamented the poverty, illness, and ignorance of farming families and especially the drudgery associated with rural womanhood and childhood. These ideas combined with 1950s notions of domesticity and the segregated environment of the South to create the default type of the white nuclear family.

This approach to the family farm meant changed roles in the enterprise for all members of the family, and altered labor relations with laborers. Management became the primary focus landowning farmers and the sons who hoped to inherit the enterprise. This shift in perception corresponded with the intensification of commercial production and the consolidation of land holdings. The same paradigm shaped women's work in the home. Good home management of newly abundant resources allowed these women to join their husbands in farm management. Their children continued to perform farm labor, but in the context of projects and chores, as education and training for management in later, rather than as essential workers to keep farms tended. Tenant farmers lost their autonomy, and eventually their tenancies, to become wage farmer labors or were forced out of farming entirely as their landlord consolidated his managerial control over rented holdings.

Progressive family agriculture devotes faced a frightening reality as the 1950s came to an end. The Carolinas had made progress in increasing farm sizes and income, but the region was still unable to compete with farm states such as California, or corn-belt and Mississippi delta states that for reasons of climate and topography enjoyed larger land holdings and longer growing seasons. There were real limits to the possible achievements of a farm economy based on subsidized commodity production alone. The theory of the treadmill dictated that for successful progressive farms to remain so, they would have to achieve greater yields and even larger economies of scale. The same process that devoured the marginal farms of the 1950s would over time chip away at the progressive farms, too. Rural communities looked for solutions, turning to commercial diversification and marketing-focused, value-added agribusiness in a process that would reveal the deepening fault lines between the farming and commercial or industrial interests in the Carolinas.

Chapter 6: “Farming is Big Business”

C. Brice Ratchford was a rising star in North Carolina’s farm agencies. In 1952, Ratchford had just completed his second Ph.D., holding doctorates in both economics and agricultural economics from Duke University and North Carolina State College. The Gastonia native had recently become the Assistant Director of the state’s Agricultural Cooperative Extension Service. Ratchford earned attention in eastern North Carolina when he weighed in on a local controversy with important implications for the economic future of the region. A serious proposal to build a regional commercial airport nearby promised economic growth and diversification, but also threatened to displace a vocal group of farmers from their land. Ratchford waded into the controversy by posing an extreme, though, as we shall see, ambiguous hypothetical. He posited in an article in the Rocky Mount newspaper, the *Evening Telegram*, that if “you take all farmers out of the area . . . Rocky Mount would dry up.”¹ Ratchford asked readers to consider the importance of each farm dollar spent in town for supplies, household goods, and utilities. Then he asked them to imagine Rocky Mount without that circulating farm income and warned the city’s professionals and businessmen that without those farm

¹ “Rocky Mount would Dry Up if Farmers taken from Area,” *Rocky Mount Evening Telegram* (March 2, 1953): 2A.

dollars “perhaps three-fourths of the people of Rocky Mount would have to go elsewhere.”²

What could they do to avert such a crisis? The economist’s answer was ambiguous. “For everyone to prosper we must move forward in agriculture. . . . If we stand still, we actually slide backward.”³ Moving forward meant different things to different people. On one hand, Ratchford sounded a familiar, reminding businessmen and professionals in town that they were not as far removed from the farm they imagined themselves. Their fortunes were closely tied to that of the surrounding farm community. Business could not prosper while farmers struggled. This caution came with a caveat. Rocky Mount only faced this gloomy future if neighboring farmers disappeared “and were not replaced,” either by new farms or some alternate economic activity.⁴ Ratchford’s statements addressed advocates of economic diversifiers and the farm community. He reassured farmers and rural landowners that their work was key to the well-being of local municipal economies. Ratchford also conveyed the developing policy

² “Rocky Mount would Dry Up,” *Rocky Mount Evening Telegram* (March 2, 1953): 2A.

³ “Rocky Mount would Dry Up,” *Rocky Mount Evening Telegram* (March 2, 1953): 2A.

⁴ “Rocky Mount would Dry Up,” *Rocky Mount Evening Telegram* (March 2, 1953): 2A.



Figure 13: C. Brice Ratchford as Assistant Director of the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service⁵

position of his and other farm agencies and organizations that greater concentration of farming concerns and a diversified economy would ultimately benefit eastern North Carolina. The Rocky Mount *Evening Telegram's* choice of headline, when seen in this light, looks less like a celebration of agriculture's importance to the city and more like a warning that Rocky Mount and surrounding areas relied far too heavily on the agricultural sector. Eastern North Carolina was attempting to chart a new course would allow them to adjust to the changes taking place in agriculture – larger farmers, greater mechanization, fewer laborers – and join the economic prosperity that was beginning to

⁵ "C. Brice Ratchford," 1959, item number 0007454, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries, Raleigh, North Carolina. Photograph used with permission.

take off in cities and towns across the South. Two strategies emerged. One favored economic diversification. The other worked to build a farm-based agribusiness economy.

The term “agribusiness” first emerged in the 1950s from the United States Department of Agriculture and Harvard Business School. It described a model of production and distribution, one that valued efficiency, industrialization, and economies of scale over small-scale production and labor-intensive farming methods.⁶ The agribusiness system encompassed the entire supply chain from seeds and equipment, to chemicals and fertilizers, to finished products for sale in restaurants and grocery stores. It emphasized production, packaging, and processing methods that created value-added products to be marketed to the “the housewife,” the archetypal consumer of food and grocery goods. An agribusiness was one that grew, manufactured, processed, or marketed farm supplies or produce on an industrial scale. It employed the most up-to-date technology to reduce labor costs and meet quality standards of grade and packaging, was often at least partially vertically integrated, and strove to reach the widest market possible.⁷

⁶ Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 113.

⁷ Shane Hamilton, *Trucking Country: The Road to America's Wal-Mart Economy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

At the farm level, agribusiness was a strategy rather than an identity. No farm family would have described their work as “agribusiness.” Nevertheless, successful commercial farms were in fact engaged in agribusiness when they adopted many of the methods of progressive farming. When farmers selected plant varieties and animal breeds that produced fibers, leaves, grains, and milk suited to the needs of industrial scale processors, they were engaged in the production of the raw materials of agribusiness. Progressive farms produced these commodities using chemicals, fertilizers, and equipment manufactured or sold by agribusiness firms. Farms that vertically integrated into ginning, packing, and other processing, storage, and marketing activities also engaged in agribusiness. From the perspective of progressive farming boosters and policy makers any distinctions between the family farm and agribusiness were meaningless. The managerial progressive family farm was the foundation of agribusiness.

As a policy objective, agribusiness was a processing and marketing-focused approach to the problem of the agricultural treadmill. Creating larger progressive farms focused on commodity production alone would not create enough new jobs in rural communities or help successful farms to stave off the inevitable effects of the agricultural treadmill. Agribusiness boosters in the Carolinas believed that larger investments in technology and marketing infrastructure were the answer to problems of

the farm economy. Even though farm sizes in the Carolinas increased steadily and significantly over the course of the 1950s, the region's farms still operated on a scale, in both land acres and annual income, much smaller than average farms in other areas of the country. While Sumter County deemed itself an "agricultural empire," the entire state of South Carolina generated less agricultural income annually than a single county in California. In this environment, farm interests worried that the all of the progress they had achieved in modernization and increased production in the decades since the Great Depression was inadequate. The logic of progressive agriculture that deemed the very small famers of the region obsolete and backward compared to their larger neighbors, if applied on a national scale, made Carolina agriculture in its entirety look insignificant. Boosters turned to agribusiness as a strategy to remain competitive and relevant.

Business interests not tied to agriculture looked for other avenues of economic growth in the Carolinas. They strived to participate in the burgeoning Sunbelt economy. In rural communities the redistribution of land, labor, and capital required to shift from agricultural production to industrial and commercial pursuits created tensions between farm and commercial interests. How these tensions played out illuminated the complicated role of federal policy in rural communities. The incentives for agricultural production warred with the community development and infrastructure funds available

to commercial investors from federal programs. This spurred competition between farming and commercial interests, but finding a way to work together would be essential to the economic success of rural counties. A new agribusiness coalition emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Their theme was “farming is big business.”

Farm-City Tensions

The Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce published an economic survey of their city in 1948, exhibiting the town’s status as the epitome of a New South city. The results showed a community greatly reliant on tobacco and textile manufacturing.⁸ The final report asserted that Rocky Mount served as the retail center of an approximately forty mile radius of rural farm communities and smaller towns, largely because it was a center of farm commodity marketing.⁹ The town hosted one of the largest tobacco markets in the country, second only to the market in nearby Wilson.¹⁰ The city improved its

⁸ For an in-depth history of Rocky Mount from the 1920s through the 1960s, see Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, “Negotiating Poverty: Economic Insecurity and the Politics of Working-Class Life in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, 1929-1969,” Ph.D. Diss, Duke University, 2003.

⁹ Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce, “An Economic Survey of Rocky Mount, North Carolina,” (Rocky Mount: Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce, Nov. 1, 1948): 6, Box 4, County Source File, 1937-1961, RG 44, Conservation and Development, State Advertising Division, SANC.

¹⁰ Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce, “An Economic Survey of Rocky Mount, North Carolina.” For the importance of tobacco warehouses in Rocky Mount, Wilson and Greenville, see Robert R. Korstad, *Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2003), and Hazirjian, “Negotiating Poverty.”

utilities infrastructure during the Depression with the help of New Deal public works funds,¹¹ but transportation facilities, beyond the railroad, were lacking.

In Rocky Mount the conservative coalition of planters and industrialists had together captained the city's low wage tobacco and textile economy in the New South era.¹² The dependence on tobacco growers and tobacco marketing came through clearly in the report. The city was home to ten tobacco redrying and stemming facilities.¹³ During the busy season, these warehouses employed approximately 2600 people, making the industry the city's largest employer, accounting for nearly one third of jobs in Rocky Mount, during tobacco season.¹⁴ But, as we have seen, there were reasons to doubt the future stability of tobacco programs in 1952 and 1953. President Eisenhower and his staunchly conservative, anti-farm subsidy Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson, appeared poised to shake the foundations of federal farm programs in the early years of their

¹¹ Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce, "An Economic Survey of Rocky Mount, North Carolina," (Rocky Mount: Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce, Nov. 1, 1948): 2, Box 4, County Source File, 1937-1961, RG 44, Conservation and Development, State Advertising Division, SANC.

¹² David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982): 33-35, 194-196; James C. Cobb, *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877-1984*, (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1984): 15.

¹³ Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce, "An Economic Survey of Rocky Mount, North Carolina," (Rocky Mount: Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce, Nov. 1, 1948): Appendix D, p. 2, Box 4, County Source File, 1937-1961, RG 44, Conservation and Development, State Advertising Division, SANC.

¹⁴ Year-round the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company employed approximately 2500 people. The textiles mills accounted for a combined 1736 jobs. All other listed industries combined, including lumber, feed and flour mills; fertilizer plants; and other manufacturers accounted for less than 1600 jobs. Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce, "An Economic Survey of Rocky Mount, North Carolina," (Rocky Mount: Rocky Mount Chamber of Commerce, Nov. 1, 1948): Appendix D, pg. 2, Box 4, County Source File, 1937-1961, RG 44, Conservation and Development, State Advertising Division, SANC.



Figure 14: Rocky Mount, Tobacco Market Opening Day, 1938. Farmers gather at the cashiers' windows to receive payment for tobacco sales. Notice that in addition to the prominent cigarette advisements, the local movie theater and department store vied for a share of farmers' newly received income. ¹⁵

administration.¹⁶ If the tobacco economy were to destabilize again, or if tobacco farm incomes were to fall significantly, there would be detrimental effects on local commerce. It was no longer clear to the business community that tobacco was the region's best option.

¹⁵ "Opening North Carolina Tobacco Markets, Tobacco Warehouse, Rocky Mount, North Carolina," Raleigh News and Observer Negative Collection, Item number NO_38_8_68, SANC, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/8514255914/in/set-72157632876659572/> (April 30, 2013). Originally published in the *News and Observer* (Raleigh, N.C.), August 26, 1938. Photo reprinted with permission of The News & Observer of Raleigh, North Carolina, and the State Archives of North Carolina.

¹⁶ See chapter 3.

If eastern North Carolina hoped to court industry, they first had to address their infrastructure problem. The region needed an expanded highway system and natural gas availability.¹⁷ Members of the Chamber of Commerce and the Rocky Mount city alderman identified improved airport facilities as key to the region's ability to attract new industries and keep up with piedmont cities. The Rocky Mount *Evening Telegram* championed this cause. Major regional and municipal airports in the Carolinas, such as the Raleigh-Durham, Greensboro, and Columbia facilities, embarked on expansion projects and increased their services in the late 1940s and early 1950s.¹⁸ Meanwhile, Rocky Mount's municipal airfield was quickly becoming obsolete. The 325-acre facility on the edge of town, with its short runways and glide angles obstructed by the smoke stacks of the Imperial Tobacco Company and the city utilities plant had reached the end of its usefulness for commercial flight. Capital Airlines, the carrier serving the town, could not land its new DC-4 aircraft at the Rocky Mount facility. Other trunk and regional carriers expressed interest in a Rocky Mount stop-over, but were similarly

¹⁷ "C&D Says Area Must Have Airport, Natural Gas to Get New Industry," *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, N.C.), October 28, 1955: 4A. The North Carolina Conservation and Development Board identified the lack of natural gas as the reason the Southern Nitrogen Company chose Savannah, Georgia, over Wilmington, North Carolina, as the site for its new fertilizer plant. City managers and chambers of commerce across the region testified to the NC General Assembly that natural gas availability was essential to their continued growth.

¹⁸ <http://www.rdu.com/aboutrd�/history.htm>; <http://www.flyfrompti.com/about/airport-history/>; <http://www.columbiaairport.com/abouttheairport/history.aspx>

restricted.¹⁹ City commercial boosters cited the supply chain and communications needs of commercial and industrial firms and argued that up-to-date facilities capable of accommodating new aircraft were necessary to attract business to the area.²⁰

In early 1951, a group of local businessmen formed the Rocky Mount Airport Commission. They met with officials from the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA), a division of the U.S. Department of Commerce with authority for approving and subsidizing civilian airport construction and expansion.²¹ The commission learned that the CAA would contribute half the funds necessary to purchase land and build runways, but that the CAA favored the development of regional facilities rather than smaller municipal airfields. In the autumn, the commission responded by meeting with the Boards of Aldermen and the Chambers of Commerce from the nearby towns of Wilson and Greenville. The group decided to apply for federal funds using what the *Telegram* termed an “area approach.” The project quickly gained momentum, and the town of Tarboro along with the Boards of Commissioners of the four affected counties joined the effort.

¹⁹ Edward L. Fike, “‘Backward’ Eastern Carolina May Become Backwash Section Without Area Airport,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, N.C.), (March 29, 1953): 1B.

²⁰ The *Telegram* asserted that an Eastern Airlines stopover was all but assured with a larger airport. But in the competition-averse regulatory environment of the early decade in which the CAB was no longer guided by the “presumption doctrine,” achieving certification of an Eastern Airlines route through Rocky Mount might have been more difficult than the *Telegram* implied.

²¹ This CAA in the Department of Commerce should not be confused with another CAA, the original name by which the CAB was briefly known.

Questions and discontent focused on the likely site for the facility emerged almost immediately. According to the *Telegram*, the Commission had not yet officially chosen a site, nor even formed a committee to do so, but credible rumors circulated that a site in southern Edgecombe County would be chosen. An area of 1000 acres was required, an expanse nearly equal to that involved in the recent Raleigh-Durham Airport expansion.²² Edgecombe County townships eight, nine, and ten possessed adequate undeveloped farm land ideally situated for a facility intended to serve the four counties. The evident suitability of the site galvanized its inhabitants' opposition to the project. The telegram blamed "an 'anonymous source'" for "stir[ing] up the farmers in the 8-9- and 10 Townships. This was obviously a sensitive point because a reference to any map would indicate that the airport would probably be located somewhere in this area since it was "equi-distant" in so far as practicable from the four cities.²³"

The paper identified farmers as the primary interest group erecting road blocks to diversification and infrastructure construction in eastern North Carolina. It portrayed them as narrow minded thinkers, lacking vision for the future, and as selfish land-hoarders. The *Telegram's* editors identified opposition to the airport as typical of farmer resistance to all infrastructure improvement projects that affected farmland, including

²² Edward L. Fike, "'Backward' Eastern Carolina May Become Backwash Section Without Area Airport," *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, N.C.), March 29, 1953: 1B.

²³ Edward L. Fike, "'Backward' Eastern Carolina May Become Backwash Section Without Area Airport," *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, N.C.), March 29, 1953: 1B.

highway construction. An editorial called on land owners to recognize that modern life required that some farm land be converted to others uses “in the name of progress.”

The author aimed his sharpest barb at implied arguments that the new airport would be a waste of good farmland. “After all, good tobacco probably would grow on Rocky Mount’s Main Street, but it is being used for something considered more worthwhile.”²⁴

This was utterly incendiary language from the primary news and opinion outlet in a quintessential tobacco town. The editors asserted that retail and commerce were not simply intertwined with agriculture, but that these activities were superior to tobacco cultivation. Tobacco production and marketing had been the lifeblood of the city, but the opportunities for expansion and job creation seemed limited in an environment in which total tobacco production was capped by government-issued allotments. For economic growth, these commercial boosters maintained, farm area towns would have to look beyond tobacco.

Furthermore, dependence on tobacco was becoming a sign of “backwardness.” Pitt County congressman Sam Worthington declared that the eastern region of North Carolina “was always kind of backward,” complaining that “we let the Piedmont get all the industry, roads and airports ahead of us.”²⁵ The *Telegram* brought to its crusade for a

²⁴ “. . . Always Kind of Backward . . .,” *The Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, N.C.), March, 18, 1953: 4A.

²⁵ “. . . Always Kind of Backward . . .,” *The Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, N.C.), March 18, 1953: 4A.

regional airport a sense of urgency and a fear of the city being excluded from prosperity they saw gaining momentum in the Piedmont region. Rocky Mount chafed at the ability of rural land owners to limit the city's growth and to stand in the way of the federal investments that were beginning to make a difference to other southern cities.²⁶ "The question before us now is whether Eastern Carolina will get into the main stream of American life or remain a quaint, idle, poor farming country – a backwash 'tobacco road' section. Without adequate airport facilities, our prospects are dim."²⁷ With these pronouncements of the backwardness of the area's economy, the *Evening Telegram* and the commission it championed a new division between the interests and goals of the commercial and farm communities in which the region's towns courted new industrial development unrelated to agriculture.²⁸

To some extent, the paper was correct. Federal farm programs, with their guaranteed price floors, gatekeeping of the marketplace, and readily available credit provided the county's farmers with rich incentives to stay put. A leading figure from

²⁶ On the importance of federal subsidies and the preferential treatment of the South when building federal facilities or granting federal contracts, see Bruce Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

²⁷ Edward L. Fike, "'Backward' Eastern Carolina May Become Backwash Section Without Area Airport," *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, N.C.), March 29, 1953: 1B.

²⁸ Fike, IB; "Lost Battles in Good Causes Refuse to Stay Lost," *Rocky Mount Evening Telegram*, June 17, 1953): 4A; "For New Airport: New Beginnings," *Rocky Mount Evening Telegram*, August 2, 1955: 4A; Edward L. Fike, "'Backward' Eastern Carolina May Become Backwash Section Without Area Airport," *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, N.C.), March 29, 1953: 1B.

the hamlet of Crisp, who figured at the forefront of the airport opposition, argued that the new airport was unnecessary because “we are getting along better than we ever have.” He saw strong commodity supports as the reason for the region’s improved economic fortunes, and those programs did work well for landowners. Successful progressive farmers had little reason to seek different work or to sell their land for the sake of new infrastructure. But to those who argued that the region had never had it better, the *Telegram* replied, “That’s unquestionably true, but that’s a terribly short-sighted view.”²⁹

In this assessment, the paper gave very short shrift to the peculiarities of farm programs that complicated farmers’ decisions to sell even part of their land for development projects. Until 1961, allotments were tied to specific plots of land. If the owner sold the land, the allotment transferred to the new owner.³⁰ The USDA did not consider the allotments to be the property of land owners. If a farmer sold a tract of farm land, even just a portion of a farm, any associated allotments would be transferred to the new owner, and the old land owner’s allotments would be reduced or lost entirely.³¹ This interpretation of the regulations governing allotment assignments caused

²⁹ Edward L. Fike, “‘Backward’ Eastern Carolina May Become Backwash Section Without Area Airport,” *Evening Telegram* (Rocky Mount, N.C.), March 29, 1953: 1B.

³⁰ James T. Ralph to Horace Godfrey, June 8, 1961 **5590**

³¹ Clarence L. Miller to John J. Riley, January 19, 1961, Box 3569, Folder “Acreage Allotments – Marketing Quotas Jan 1 – Aug 31, 1961, RG 16, NARA.

many farmers to think twice before they sold their land, either to other farmers or for non-farm uses.

In 1960, the ASC and members of the congressional agriculture committees received many complaints, especially from North Carolina farmers, about this policy. A Kernersville farmer wished to sell small lots from his land for homebuilding, but was concerned that doing so would jeopardize his allotment. As the prospective buyers had no intentions of growing tobacco themselves, keeping his allotment intact seemed little to ask, and “it would very greatly aid a lot of people.”³² Others found themselves surprised about effects on their allotments after the fact. Buncombe County farmer A.J. Curtis did not know that his tobacco allotment had been reduced after the sale of “wood land on which no crops has ever been raised,” until he received notice that the tobacco planted on his remaining farmland exceeded his allotment. Curtis threatened to sue the ASC and the person to whom he sold the woodland.³³ Farmers near Kinston petitioned Congressman Harold Cooley asking for revisions to the rules that would aid small farmers in their community when farm land was diverted to industrial uses. “The tobacco farmers are very much upset over what is happening in our community . . . Tobacco lost from land for community expansion and industrial development is now put into the Federal acreage pool and lost to other counties or states. We in Lenoir

³² M.E. Fagg to Ralph J. Scott, May 24, 1960, Box 9, Folder “Tobacco 15 Jun 1960” RG145, NARA.

³³ A.J. Curtis to Blanche Edmonds, June 27, 1960, Box 9, Folder “Tobacco 15 Jun 1960” RG145, NARA.

County want this acreage to stay in Lenoir County and be allocated to hardship cases, i.e. to those who the lowest percentage of acres of tobacco relative to their total cleared acres.”³⁴

Whether farmers wished to keep allotments for themselves or to redistribute them among the community, existing allotment policies made it very difficult for farmers to part with any of their land without cutting significantly into their ability to produce their most important crops, even if they otherwise might have wished to sell. It is no accident that North Carolina farmers were among the most vocal in opposing this practice. The state’s large quantity of tobacco acreage made allotment administration in North Carolina especially complicated. Allotments for tobacco were, on average, smaller than for any other regulated crop. They were also determined to the smallest unit of measurement of any crop. Only in tobacco were allotments figured to the hundredth of an acre. With so many farmers reliant on small tobacco acreages, such small units were important, and even small acreage losses could be damaging to small growers.³⁵

When the North Carolina’s chief ASC administrator became the head of the Commodity Stabilization Service in 1961, this problem was one of the first he addressed.

³⁴ Rachel D. Davis to Harold Cooley, June 2, 1960, Box 9, Folder “Tobacco 15 Jun 1960” RG145, NARA.

³⁵ Horace Godfrey to James T. Ralph, June 13, 1961, Box 2, Folder “Commodities – Tobacco, 1961,” RG 145, NARA.

Godfrey's revisions made it possible to sell a portion of a farm without losing a portion of the allotment. Allotments remained attached to the land, but so long as the acreage exceed the allotment it need not be revised downward. As a result, a land owner could sell a portion of his or her farm and could, with approval from the county committee. Godfrey pointed to advantages for smaller farmers who could cash in assets and keep up their productive capacity or make transfers of land within families without penalty.³⁶ The new allotment policy could also free up land for sale for non-farm uses.

Prior to these adjustments in 1961 allotment policies kept farmland locked into farm uses. Other conservation policies that involved yearly payments or long-term contracts committed some land to conservation schemes such as tree plantings or drainage fields. As airport advocates pushed their project through the mid-1950s, they encountered the strong disincentives to sell farmland that agriculture policy created. Infrastructure subsidies and vague hopes of future prosperity could not overcome these existing commitments. The farm community did recognize the need for further economic development to expand markets for their produce and to provide jobs for displaced farm works. They offered different solutions to the problem than their urban commercial and professional counterparts. They turned to agribusiness boosterism to court farm-based growth and innovation.

³⁶ Horace Godfrey to James T. Ralph, June 13, 1961, Box 2, Folder "Commodities – Tobacco, 1961," RG 145, NARA.

Agribusiness Boosterism

Farming and agribusiness developed its own booster strategy in the 1950s and early 1960s, designed to combat charges of backwardness. They insisted that agriculture was and could continue to be the foundation of a thriving economy. A 1960s pamphlet of the Association of Southern Agricultural Workers – an organization of farm agency employees – illustrated the point. Artwork showed a man on a tractor plowing his field, with the skyline of a city, complete with tall buildings and puffing smoke stacks, in the background. “Southern Agriculture is BIG Business,” was the motto emblazoned on the front. Countering charges of backwardness, the pamphlet author, Association president and NC State College of Agriculture dean D. W. Colvard, asserted that agriculture was rife with opportunities. Thanks to research and leadership, he wrote, southern agriculture had advanced beyond the “primitive and simple” and that “the roles of people, land, technology and capital” had changed. The result was “greater opportunities” for those who embraced modern methods and showed entrepreneurial spirit.³⁷

³⁷ D. W. Colvard, “Southern Agriculture is BIG Business,” Association of Southern Agricultural Workers, February 1, 1960, p. 2, Box 6, Folder “Assoc. of Sou. Agr. Workers, 1941-60,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.



Figure 15: "Southern Agriculture is Big Business," February 1, 1960³⁸

The pamphlet's artwork and its sales pitch placed farming in the foreground of a united industrial and commercial economy. Colvard and other agribusiness proponents understood that "teamwork of farming related business and industry" and

³⁸ "Southern Agriculture is Big Business," Association of Southern Agricultural Workers, February 1, 1960, Box 6, Folder "Association of Southern Agricultural Workers," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU. Used with permission.

“communication and understanding” between agricultural and commercial sectors would be essential to farm-based economic growth.³⁹ New and strengthened partnerships with the business community would connect farmers and farm-related business with customers. Like industry, agribusiness would require expanded infrastructures for farm produce handling and marketing. In response, agribusiness boosters emerged from a range of institutions to build networks and seek models of farm-based development. They were the officers and administrators of the federal and state farm organizations, as well as some interested members of Chambers of Commerce, the leaders of land grant colleges, state government officials, representatives from state boards of economic development, and crucially, members of the commercial banking community.

Credit was essential to emerging agribusiness. The integration of southern commercial banks into the farm economy was an important project of agribusiness boosterism. The South’s agricultural capital and credit needs were never adequately met by Southern banks before the Depression.⁴⁰ The federal government began to

³⁹ “Southern Agriculture is Big Business,” Association of Southern Agricultural Workers, February 1, 1960, Box 6, Folder “Association of Southern Agricultural Workers,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁴⁰ Farm credit institutions, either those supported or operated by the federal government or private banks, is a subject historians have largely left to agricultural economists. We know next to nothing about the role of the community banking system or of the region’s growing nationally chartered banks in farm communities in the post-World War II South and very little about the on-the-ground workings of the federal farm credit system.

intervene in the farm credit market early in the twentieth century. Federal Land Bank (FLB) operations employed a decentralized structure similar to that of the Federal Reserve, and both institutions opened for business in 1916.⁴¹ Throughout the period that followed, National Farm Loan Associations issued Federal Land Bank loans to farmers

Prior to the Great Depression, the southern states were badly underserved by commercial banking institutions. The dearth of southern banks was both a symptom and a cause of the collapse of the tenancy and sharecropping systems that evolved after the Civil War. As Harold Woodman explains, in the cash-starved economy of the former Confederacy, where plantation owners lost much of their assets to emancipation and black farm laborers found themselves in a position to bargain the terms of their employment for the first time, tenancy and sharecropping developed as a way for land owners to secure a labor force. Planters tied the compensation of nominally independent workers to farm production, circumventing the need to pay wages in scarcely available cash. Land owners and furnishing merchants provided access to farm supplies, groceries, and other basic necessities on credit, guaranteed by the projected value of the cotton crop growing in the field. Tenants and share croppers who lived on this type of credit paid exorbitant prices for their goods and often owed their landlords or merchants far more than their cotton brought at the end of the year – deficit sometimes exacerbated by creative accounting by creditors that many victims were too illiterate or too powerless to contest. In this economy, cotton, not cash, was the currency. And in the absence of cash, banks proved both unnecessary for agrarian economic activity and difficult to establish. Harold Woodman, *New South – New Law: The Legal Foundations of Credit and Labor Relations in the Postbellum Agricultural South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995)

Limited local banking options and the lack of liquid assets restricted the means and incentives for investment in economic development in the South by southerners. It was no accident that much industrial development, especially in the textile industry, of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries originated from outside sources. The southeastern piedmont, ranging from southern, central Virginia into the central region of South Carolina received the bulk of such investment. The Piedmont could thank the fortunes of geography, for the region featured reliably flowing rivers and a rapidly falling elevation from the mountains to the coast ideal for powering textile manufacturing. The region's homegrown industrial powerhouse, tobacco processing, located in the piedmont for similar reasons, and when local tobacco barons, such as the Duke family, sought investment opportunities for their fortune, those same rivers proved ripe for electricity production. While the eastern regions of the Virginia and the Carolinas remained cash poor and agriculturally focused, the piedmont grew more industrialized and wealthy. It was to this history that Sam Worthington referred when he lamented that "we let the Piedmont get all the industry, roads and airports ahead of us." On the growth of piedmont industries, see Jacquelyn Hall, et.al. *Like a Family: The Making of A Southern Cotton Mill World*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

⁴¹ Robert N. Collender and Steven R. Koenig, "The Role of Federal Credit Programs," Marvin Duncan and Jerome M. Stam, eds., *Financing Agriculture in the Twenty-first Century*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 135.

and third party lenders, mostly as long-term mortgages, but more than half of NFLAs were failing by 1933.⁴² Nationally, private bank lending to agriculture (for operating capital and equipment, not land purchases) peaked in 1921 at nearly four billion dollars, but this figure fell off rapidly as the agricultural sector descended into depression in the 1920s and did not return to this level until 1958.⁴³

New Deal legislation authorized a new system for distribution of FLB loans, the Farm Credit Administration (FCA).⁴⁴ By 1937 the FCA held 40 percent of U.S. farm mortgage debt. Mortgages alone could not fulfill farmers' credit needs. The Farm Credit Act authorized the establishment of cooperative Production Credit Associations (PCAs). Operating credit from the PCA in the form of "low-cost loans were also intended to help farm families remain on their farms or reestablish themselves in farming" by "providing liquidity to farm capital markets that suffered from a withdrawal of many suppliers of debt capital."⁴⁵ PCAs were cooperative lending institutions organized in each county, as the "largely attended" meeting in Kershaw County, South Carolina, where farmers

⁴² "Chronology," America's Farm Credit Archive, <http://www.farmcreditarchive.org/chronology/default.aspx>, (Feb 10, 2012). NFLA is credited as the origin of the distinctly American 30-year mortgage.

⁴³ Benjamin J. Klebaner, *American Commercial Banking: A History*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990), 202.

⁴⁴ USDA-based agricultural economists Collender and Koenig have argued that the goals of the FCAs, like those of the Resettlement Administration, was to promote land ownership with the belief that landowning farmers would be better stewards of the land than transient share cropper and tenants had been of the badly eroded and depleted southern soils. Yet while the RA's efforts were limited in scope and intended to ease individual families' dependence on staple agriculture, the FCA served a broader farming public and worked in concert with the AAA framework of regulated commodity production.

⁴⁵ Collender and Koenig, "The Role of Federal Credit Programs," 140.

gathered for “the purpose of hearing representatives of the Production Credit Corporation of Columbia discuss the organizing of a county association.”⁴⁶ The federal government provided much of the capital necessary to fund the early PCA loans, and borrowers paid membership fees of approximately five percent of the value of the loan, making all borrowers members of the cooperative. Farmers turned to the PCAs to fill the gaps left when traditional sources of financing fell to the Depression. Personal bankruptcies and bank closings and the dissolution of the furnishing merchant system and person-to-person loans that had financed New South agriculture.⁴⁷

The story of Rhett McGregor’s South Carolina dairy farm helps demonstrate the credit obtaining strategies of farmers who struggled during the Depression, but, with the help of federal lending sources, emerged from the era with successful enterprises. In his 1953 Master Farm Family award nomination, McGregor described his assets when he began farming as an adult: “Father lost the farm[,] and I inherited 16 cows and 5

⁴⁶ A. A. McKeown, “Monthly Report: Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, State of South Carolina,” November 1933, p. 2, Box 22, Folder 665, STI, Cooperative Extension Service, Field Operations, 1918-1985, Series 33, STI.

⁴⁷ The ABA tracked the total dollar value of farm loans made by the FHA, the Federal Farm Mortgage Corporation, joint-stock land banks, Federal Land Banks, life insurance companies, commercial banks, and “individuals and others.” Loans by “individuals and others” were probably under-reported in the ABA’s figures, but the Agricultural Credit Report found the overall value of such loans to drop sharply between 1930 and 1935, and to continue their downward trend through 1946. The trend then reversed, but by 1958 the value of loans by individuals and others barely reached 1930 levels and experienced the slowest rate of increase for all loan types from 1945-1959. Agricultural Commission, American Bankers Association, “1959 Agricultural Credit and Related Data,” Chart D, p. 26, Box 3293, File “Farm Credit 1, Loans, May 7 - June 30 [1959],” RG16, NARA.

mules[.]”⁴⁸ An inheritance of livestock and work animals was no small thing, but without land, Rhett McGregor moved nearer his wife’s family where he purchased land on which to grow cotton.⁴⁹ His son, Sam McGregor vividly recalled the man, a Mr. Sessoms, from whom his father borrowed the money to purchase that farm. “I remember he drove a black Packard automobile and he wore a black suit, smoked a cigar, and . . . you had to be nice to Mr. Sessoms.”⁵⁰ The low cotton prices of the 1930s undermined even the best cotton farms, and as Sam McGregor recalled, theirs was not the best. It suffered from “poor soil, sandy soil and this was not a very productive cotton farm. . . . And cotton went down to five cents a pound and so [my father] went into the dairy business.”⁵¹

The McGregors lost their cotton farm in 1938.⁵² In order to start anew on different land, this time in the dairy business, Rhett McGregor told the Master Farm Family judges that he borrowed money from the Federal Land Bank. He built his house with a loan from the Farmers Home Administration. For both Rhett and Sam McGregor

⁴⁸ “The Master Farm Family Record, Rhett M. McGregor,” 1953, Box 110, Folder 9, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STL.

⁴⁹ “The Master Farm Family Record, Rhett M. McGregor,” 1953, Box 110, Folder 9, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STL.

⁵⁰ Interview, Sam McGregor by Elizabeth Brake, September 16, 2011, transcript in author’s possession , p. 18.

⁵¹ Interview, Sam McGregor by Elizabeth Brake, September 16, 2011, transcript in author’s possession , p. 18

⁵² Interview, Sam McGregor by Elizabeth Brake, September 16, 2011, transcript in author’s possession , p. 18

this was the beginning of a career-long relationship with federal farm credit agencies.

Rhett McGregor served as the president of his local Production Credit Association, and he and his wife regularly attended PCA conferences well into their retirement.⁵³ When Sam McGregor took over the operations of their dairy farm, he considered federal loans a competitive alternative among several available options for his credit needs.⁵⁴

Ideally, the PCA and FHA borrowers would acquire assets and develop cash flow thanks to federal credit and the modernization of their farming operations and homes that such credit terms encouraged and enabled. These families and farms would emerge from the federal lending apparatus as homeowners and experienced borrowers, creditworthy customers of their community's private banks. Practical circumstances created more fluid realities. Federal loans did not merely offer credit with training wheels for needy rural customers. Federal lending institutions enjoyed important advantages over small scale community banks that made them attractive lenders for more affluent farmers. Because they could draw public funds, Federal Land Bank and Production Credit Association loans in many areas were larger and offered longer

⁵³ "The 'Master Farm Family Record': Rhett M. McGregor," 1953, Box 110, Folder 9, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI; Rhett McGregor attended a PCA meeting in Camden, S.C., in July, 1967 attended the national PCA conference in Atlanta, June 1969, Sam McGregor, "Laurinton Dairy Farm, Daily Log, 1962-1973," (unprocessed), July 27, 1967, June 7, 1969, Acquisition Number 07-69, 09-74, STI.

⁵⁴ For instance, Sam McGregor applied for a loan from the Federal Land Bank to build a new milking shed in January, 1967. In 1971, he was making payments on a Production Credit Association loan. Sam McGregor, "Laurinton Dairy Farm, Daily Log, 1962-1973," (unprocessed), February 1-3, 6, 1967, May 28, 1971, Acquisition Number 07-69, 09-74, STI.

repayment terms than local banks, which were reliant on deposits, could offer. Federal loans better suited than community bank loans to the requirements of larger commercial farms seeking larger sums and repayment terms tailored to the agricultural business cycle.

Southern farmers depended most heavily on PCA loans for operating capital and other non-real estate purchases. In 1959, the value of non-real estate bank loans to agriculture, nationally, outpaced PCA loans 54 to 46 percent. Yet in PCA District 2, comprised of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, the PCA made, on average, 52 percent of all non-real estate farm loans. District 2 was the only district in the country in which the PCA made more than half of all loans. In its nearest rival, District 4, consisting of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, the PCA made only 37 percent of farm loans.⁵⁵ In California, Kansas, and Iowa, agricultural giants to which Carolina agribusiness advocates looked for example business models, commercial banks made an average of 90 percent of all non-real-estate farm loans. (See table 5, below, for a comparison of District 2 states and other selected agricultural states.)

⁵⁵ Agricultural Commission, American Bankers Association, "1959 Agricultural Credit and Related Data," pp. 28-29, Box 3293, File "Farm Credit 1, Loans, May 7 - June 30 [1959]," RG16, NARA.

Table 5: Comparison of Bank PCA non-real estate loans to agriculture, January, 1959⁵⁶

State	District	% Non-Real Estate Farm loans by Banks	% Non-Real Estate Farm loans by PCA
US		54	46
N. Carolina	2	54	46
S. Carolina	2	44	56
Georgia	2	59	41
Florida	2	48	52
California	10	88	12
Iowa	8	93	7
Kansas	9	87	13

In the years between the 1930s and the mid-1950s, commercial banks largely left the field of agricultural financing to the federal credit agencies in the Carolinas.⁵⁷ This began to change the farm sector generally became more prosperous and stable, and as agribusiness sought new sources of capital. Farm programs that provided effective price floors and nearly guaranteed markets made issuing credit for agricultural production less risky for commercial lenders than before the New Deal. Further, lending statistics suggest that PCA credit was sufficient to maintain regulated commodity production, but it was not sufficient for expansion into agribusiness ventures like packing, and ginning,

⁵⁶ Agricultural Commission, American Bankers Association, "1959 Agricultural Credit and Related Data," p. 28, Box 3293, File "Farm Credit 1, Loans, May 7 - June 30 [1959]," RG16, NARA.

⁵⁷ For an analysis of developments in farm credit and their effects on farm investment, see Sally Clarke. Clark demonstrates that in the Depression years there was a net transfer of farm lending from commercial sources to government lenders thanks to refinancing programs. Sally Clark, *Regulation and Revolution in United States Farm Productivity* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 187-190.

and would not finance industrial scale processing, marketing, and distribution facilities. For that new sources of capital would be necessary.

Farm agencies and organizations also explained their agribusiness goals to their local bankers and business community. In counties across South Carolina these groups came together in tentative efforts to understand each other's needs and press their own agendas. This process involved network building among these groups. Farm agency officials and farm organizations partnered with banks and local Chambers of Commerce to promote the message that farming is "big business." The Southern Agricultural Workers, and organization of farm agency employees and officers, laid out a "platform for progress" that pointed to the need for such cooperation. In addition to research and education, rural progress would require "teamwork of farming related businesses and industry" as well as "communications and understanding" among these groups.⁵⁸

In 1958, the South Carolina Extension service surveyed the Chambers of Commerce in South Carolina to determine what kind of agriculture related programs they conducted.⁵⁹ They found that many of South Carolina's Chambers of Commerce were newly organized or struggling. The Oconee County chamber was established in

⁵⁸ D. W. Colvard, "Southern Agriculture is BIG Business," Association of Southern Agricultural Workers, February 1, 1960, p. 2, Box 6, Folder "Assoc. of Sou. Agr. Workers, 1941-60," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁵⁹ The archive holds survey responses from 14 Chamber of Commerce organizations, found in Box 29, Folder 1, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

1952,⁶⁰ Conway's in 1958,⁶¹ and the Aiken Chamber of Commerce nearly disbanded in 1957.⁶² Survey responses showed these groups' uneven and mostly tentative engagement with agricultural issues in the 1950s, as well as emerging efforts to cross the divide. Typically Chambers of Commerce sponsored farm contests and 4-H competitions and awards, but were otherwise not directly involved in agriculture unless there were direct implications for town and commercial facilities. For this reason, several took an active interests in watershed management, as erosion could affect both farms and municipalities.⁶³ The Anderson Chamber of Commerce, was an exception. The county was home to Clemson University, and the Chamber was engaged in promoting business growth based on farm product processing and storage. Packing sheds and dairy facilities, grain elevators, and farmers markets were among the Anderson Chamber's projects.⁶⁴

Ventures of this type were exactly what that southern agribusiness proponents hoped to develop further. In 1953, the *Progressive Farmer* published a special issue on the

⁶⁰ John W. [Duncan], "Activities of the Oconee County Planning and Development Board," May 6, 1958, p. 1, Box 29, Folder 1, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁶¹ E. Arthur Tate to George B. Nutt, n.d., Box 29, Folder 1, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁶² A. H. Ward, "Activities of the Aiken Chamber of Commerce," p. 7, May 2 1958, Box 29, Folder 1, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁶³ John M. Duncan, "Activities of the Oconee County Planning & Development Board," May 6, 1958, p. 4, Box 29, Folder 1, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI; J. W. Grazier, "Activities of the Chester County Board of Commerce & Development," May 5, 1958, p. 4, Box 29, Folder 1, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁶⁴ Z. W. Meeks, "Activities of the Anderson, South Carolina Chamber of Commerce," n.d. [1958], p. 2, Box 29, Folder 1, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

development of farm-related businesses in which it emphatically described the unmet economic potential of agriculture-related business in the South. *"Every crop and every animal enterprise included in Southern farming systems demands marketing, processing, and distribution equipment and services. FEW ARE ADEQUATELY AND COMPLETELY SERVICED AT THE PRESENT TIME. Also, every supply item that farmers buy must be made and distributed.*

New enterprises – crops and animals – mean new kinds and types of supply equipment and materials, therefore, new business opportunities."⁶⁵ 1960s included new agribusiness tours in which the farm community showed off their Efforts to forge tighter links between farm and business interests in the late early existing marketing and processing facilities and made a pitch for further interest and support in these endeavors from local businessmen.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ "New Rural Industries that Fit Your Community," *The Progressive Farmer* Raleigh, N.C., 1953, p. 4, Box 14, File "P, 1948-1959," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU. Emphasis as in original.

⁶⁶ For an analysis on how Georgia onion growers pursued marketing and production strategies that converted Vidalia onions from a local and only seasonally available crop to a nationally marketed and internationally produced commodity available in stores year round, see Tore C. Olsson, "Peeling Back the Layers: Vidalia Onions and the Making of a Global Agribusiness," *Enterprise and Society*, 13:4, (December, 2012): 762-772. Olsson demonstrates that Vidalia growers engaged in boosterish strategies that traded on the identity of onion growers as family farmers and the special qualities of Georgia soil to market onions on a national scale.

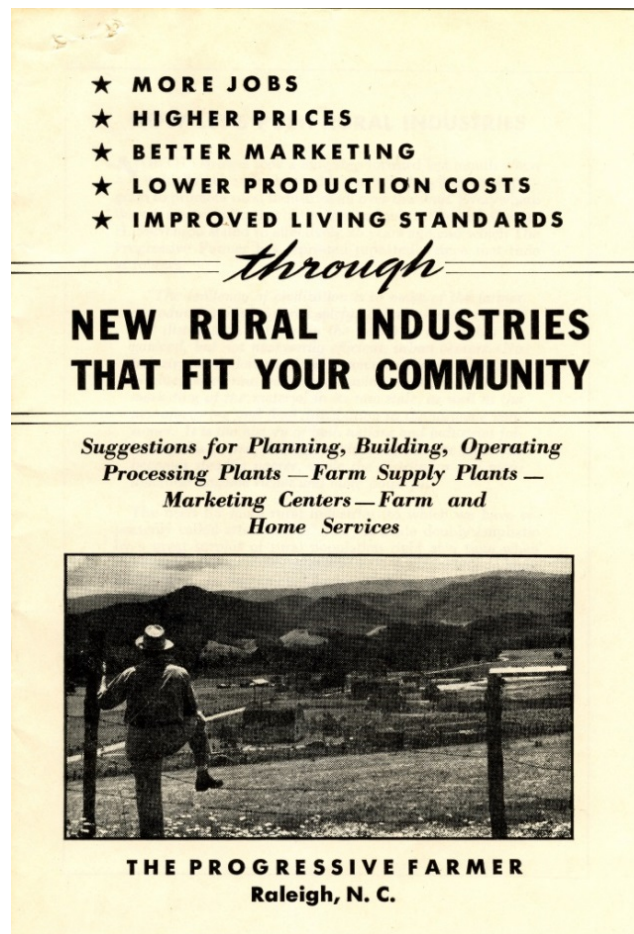


Figure 16: Cover of a 1953 Progressive Farmer publication, advocating for development of farm-related industries⁶⁷

Farmers could not expanded their agribusiness enterprises alone. The farm economy required investment from and cooperation with the local business community. In an effort to nurture these relationships, farm agencies and the business community

⁶⁷ “New Rural Industries that Fit Your Community,” *The Progressive Farmer* Raleigh, N.C., 1953, Box 14, File “P, 1948-1959,” North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries. Used with permission.

staged farm tours and other events designed to promote contact and conversation between the two groups. Orangeburg's Chamber of Commerce had organized two "Business-Farm Days" in which businessmen toured local farms.⁶⁸ Chester County's Chamber planned a "Farmer-Merchant picnic" for June 1958.⁶⁹ On June 8, 1959, Sumter County, South Carolina held a county tour, billed as its "first annual Agri-Business Day."⁷⁰ Early that morning, attendees piled into two air-conditioned busses outfitted with public address equipment and departed on a tour of the county. Brief visits and drive-by viewings of the area's agribusiness gems and most successful farms filled their morning while Extension officials narrated the scene. Tour stops emphasized large scale enterprises over smaller; crop diversity over cotton monoculture; storage and marketing facilities over production; and modernization across the board. Tour organizers invited participants to marvel at Sumter's the steps the county's farmers were already taking to develop agribusiness in their communities and to see the potential for future growth.

Planning for the agribusiness day festivities began as a joint project between the Sumter County Extension office and the agricultural committee of the Sumter Chamber

⁶⁸ S. Ernie Wright, "Activities of the Orangeburg South Carolina Chamber of Commerce," May 5, 1958, p. 5, Box 29, Folder 1, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁶⁹ J. W. Grazier, "Activities of the Chester County Board of Commerce and Development," May 5, 1958, p.6, Box 29, Folder 1, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁷⁰ Prior to May 1958, the Sumter Chamber of Commerce had held a "pasture tour" and a "tour of agricultural leaders in cooperation with the extension service." Worth D. Holder, "Activities of the Sumter, South Carolina Chamber of Commerce," May 3, 1958, p. 3, Box 29, Folder 1, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

of Commerce. The cooperation between the Chamber and the county's agricultural organizations had been limited prior to the organization of the tour. In 1958, the manager of Sumter's Chamber of Commerce explained in an Extension Service survey that "agricultural activity by the chamber is one of its most difficult areas of endeavor. This is caused by the fact that agriculture is so highly organized that there are very few areas where programs are not now being sponsored." The chamber's role, he explained was primarily one of "support and assistance." "We have informed" the agricultural organizations "that we will aid them in every way when THEY need our help."⁷¹ From the Sumter Chamber's point of view, with the many state programs and farm groups active in the region, agriculture was both organized and insular. It was not clear to them, or to most of South Carolina's Chamber of Commerce, gauging from the response surveys, how best to address agricultural questions or even if they should.

This limited engagement with agriculture likely explains the Sumter Chamber's general lack of interest in event planning and promotion surrounding the first Agri Business Day. As the report of the planning committee explained, "the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce sent invitations to all members of the Chamber of Commerce to purchase tickets but the response was very discouraging." Undeterred, organizers reached out to the local business community directly, without the intervening influence

⁷¹ Worth D. Holder, "Activities of the Sumter, South Carolina Chamber of Commerce," May 3, 1958, p. 7, Box 29, Folder 1, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

of the Chamber, with success. The steering committee sold tickets to individual businessman. Each purchaser received two tickets, one for himself and one he was to use to bring a farmer as his guest. Thanks to sponsorship by Sumter County's banks who covered the cost of the entire venture, tickets sold for only a nominal price. They served not to fund the project but to encourage attendance by making individuals feel invested. "No ticket was sold to a businessman unless he promised to attend. . . . [The] sale of these tickets were [sic] responsible to a large degree for the success of the day."⁷² With or without the leadership of the Chamber of Commerce, Agribusiness Day organizers brought the farm and business community together and facilitated cooperation between the two.

The planning committee gave great attention to the local politics that shaped relationships within and between of the Chamber, agricultural agencies, and farmers in the community, and went to great lengths to avoid controversy over the choice of participants in its first Agri-Business Day. These efforts began with the Chamber of Commerce, which retained organizing credit even though its membership lacked enthusiasm for the project. Though disappointed in the Chamber's response to the initial invitation to purchase tickets, the steering committee explained that reaching out to the members in such a manner had been necessary for it "serve[ed] to make all

⁷² "Outline of Development and Carrying Out of the Agri-Business Day in Sumter County, 1959," p. 1, Box 2B, Folder 25, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

members feel they were invited.” Nor was it only the members of the Chamber of Commerce who required special attention. Organizers invited state level officials of the various farm agencies to attend a dinner at the home of the Sumter County Agent on the evening preceding the tour. Officials met over plates of barbecue chicken in an informal gathering that “create[d] a better spirit of friendship between the agencies.” In addition, the steering committee took great care in choosing the farms and facilities they visited. “To avoid criticism we called in representatives of other agencies along with our agricultural committee to select farmers from geographic locations and the standpoint of farm interests.” The choice of tour guides and narrators was also made carefully.⁷³ Gathering together the four distinct constituencies that made up Sumter’s emerging agribusiness community in a celebration of the county’s agricultural success and a pitch for greater investment required careful attention.

The organizers were attempting to forge connections and build relationships. They chose participants with an eye to reputation, skill, and official position. They wanted to avoid conflict that would prove a distraction from their goals. The theme of the day, “the inter-relationship and the inter-dependence of Agriculture and Business,”⁷⁴ was woven through the commentary. More to the point: agriculture was Sumter’s

⁷³ “Outline of Development and Carrying Out of the Agri-Business Day in Sumter County, 1959,” p. 1, Box 2B, Folder 25, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁷⁴ “Outline of Development and Carrying Out of the Agri-Business Day in Sumter County, 1959,” p. 2, Box 2B, Folder 25, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

business. Listeners heard that Harvin Packing Company employed fifty people with a total annual payroll of \$168 thousand dollars, and that the facility processed nearly four million pounds of pork and beef annually. They learned that Sumter Grain Elevator's had a 325,000 bushel capacity.⁷⁵ They visited the operations of established and respected master farmers and up-and-coming growers such Tom Keels, "one of our leading young farmers" whose "wife has done a great deal on [the] Home Demonstration Council, especially in . . . 4-H work."⁷⁶ Farming operations that tended large acreages, raised substantially sized herds, or engaged in conservation measures – including crop diversification and rotation – received ample admiration.

The take home message for Sumter's bankers and businessmen was that farmers had money to spend in local business, that they were themselves managers of complex businesses that required significant investment. When the tour passed through an heavily farmed area known as "Mayes Opening," the guides emphasized the point. Several Mayes Opening farmers had a quarter of a million dollars invested in equipment alone, such as a single farmer who owned six self-propelled combines. His equipment investment proved both necessary and feasible because Mayes Opening operations were by 1950s Carolinas' standards very large, with two farmers raising 3,400 acres of

⁷⁵ "Agri-Business Day, Sumter, South Carolina, Guide's Commentary," p. 1, Box 2B, Folder 25, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁷⁶ "Agri-Business Day, Sumter, South Carolina, Guide's Commentary," p. 1-2, Box 2B, Folder 25, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

cotton and another raising 2,000 acres of soy beans. Robert C. Edwards, president of Clemson College echoed the point in his luncheon remarks. After all the assembled crowd saw that morning, he spoke of “the Agricultural Empire of Sumter County” where capitalization was increasing, farmers were thinking like businessmen, and the meaning of the word “agribusiness”⁷⁷ could be clearly seen in practice. Referencing the extraordinarily large equipment fleets of the Mayes Opening farmers, and the preponderance of young farmers making the switch from mules to tractors, Edwards concluded that “With this new advance in agriculture much more capital is needed, therefore the credit systems had to be revised and bankers and lending agencies are having to take a new look in order to keep abreast with this big business of progressive farming.”⁷⁸

The pursuit of agribusiness offered one approach to reconciling simmering tensions between the county’s farming and industrial interests. Edwards offered both praise and gentle admonishments to the commercial and agricultural factions in the room. He celebrated the cooperation the members of his audience that contributed to the

⁷⁷ Robert C. Edwards, “Remarks,” June 18, 1959, p. 2, Box 2B, Folder 25, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁷⁸ Robert C. Edwards, “Remarks,” June 18, 1959, p. 4, Box 2B, Folder 25, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI. An agribusiness tour of the Chesterfield County in 1961 had a similar message. *The State* reported that the goals of the purposes of the tour were “1. To recognize that agriculture is still our most basic industry; 2. To promote the idea that agriculture and business are dependent upon each other for success; 3. And to acquaint businessmen with many of the changes that taken place in agriculture in Chesterfield County.” Bob Bentley, “Agriculture Still Held ‘Basically Important,’” *The State* (Columbia, S.C.), June 15, 1961.

success of agribusiness in the county. "Much of this was brought about by vision, hard work, and cooperation by farmers, your county agent, the business people and your Chamber of Commerce. All goes to show what can be done with vision, cooperation and hard work in this thing called Agribusiness."⁷⁹ Sumter's Agri-Business Day and similar efforts in counties across the South provided an opportunity for farmers and businessmen to "discuss the mutual problems and try to reach more of a common understanding."⁸⁰

Edwards recognized the efforts of the Industrial Development Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, whose work expanded Sumter's industrial sector in the 1950s. The trend offered mixed blessings to the Agricultural Empire, for while Sumter's farms were growing larger and more mechanized, Edwards told his audience, approximately three percent of the county's farms ceased operations every five years. "Where are they going," he asked. "To our new industries which are furnishing employment as well as more markets for Agricultural products."⁸¹ Therefore, he cautioned farmers not to resist industrialization in their communities in the interests of lower labor and land costs when "much of this blame cannot be laid at the feet of your local businessman but goes

⁷⁹ Robert C. Edwards, "Remarks," June 18, 1959, p. 3, Box 2B, Folder 25, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁸⁰ Robert C. Edwards, "Remarks," June 18, 1959, p. 8, Box 2B, Folder 25, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁸¹ Robert C. Edwards, "Remarks," June 18, 1959, p. 5, Box 2B, Folder 25, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

far deeper into tariffs, labor laws, etc.”⁸² Edwards used the language of the parity here, but with a twist. He enjoined farmers to remember that whatever disadvantages felt they endured at the hands of middlemen and consumers in the wider economy, at home such resentments should not stand in the way of cooperation with the business community to promote local prosperity.

And lest the industrialists and the professionals in this audience forget, Edwards declared that in Sumter, agriculture was still the “goose that lays the golden egg.”⁸³ His remarks reflected a particular bias in the thinking of agricultural policy makers and farm agency leaders of the time. Even as individuals left the farm, the assumption endured that agriculture was the default occupation of rural people. While commending local industry for creating jobs in rural areas, Edwards diminished the importance relative to agriculture. This bias is clear in the Chamber of Commerce surveys as well. The survey did not ask what the Chambers were doing to attract new industry to their communities. They asked what was being done in order to “develop new industries to provide employment of [the] surplus farm population.” This perspective was not unique to South Carolina. At a 1957 meeting of the North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies, David Weaver’s presentation discussed the potential of agricultural

⁸² Robert C. Edwards, “Remarks,” June 18, 1959, p. 8, Box 2B, Folder 25, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

⁸³ Robert C. Edwards, “Remarks,” June 18, 1959, p. 8, Box 2B, Folder 25, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

processing to provide employment for “the agricultural youth, “boys who normally look at farming as a career,” but “would have to look elsewhere” as farms grew larger and more reliant on machinery.⁸⁴ Even in “surplus,” rural workers were farm workers first.

If South Carolina’s farm leaders viewed industrial development as secondary to farm development, why did they court the business and banking community so assiduously? Their agenda was both political and financial. Edwards embarked on a passionate defense of farm support programs, speaking to those who might have doubted their necessity when faced with the prosperity showcased by the tour. Farming was risky business, supports were necessary to raise rural standards of living. Edward’s message was clear. Sumter would thrive on agribusiness, but agribusiness would thrive in Sumter only if ready financing could be found in a supportive policy environment, both locally and nationally. Successful agribusiness required overcoming the divisions between agriculture and industry that parity so successfully built.

South Carolina’s state officials and leading newspaper joined the agribusiness boosters. In June 1961, Governor Ernest Hollings published his vision for South Carolina’s economy in *The State*. The paper used Hollings’s statement to kick off a series of lengthy features on South Carolina’s industries and agriculture. They outlined for

⁸⁴ “Minutes of Semi-Annual Meeting of North Carolina Board of Farm Organizations and Agencies,” July 17-18, 1957, p. 5, Box 14, Binder, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

citizens and potential investors alike the potential of a blended agricultural and industrial economy, what Hollings called a “progressive economy.”⁸⁵ *The State* reported that North and South Carolina competed neck and neck for the designation of “No. 1 textile state” in the United States, but South Carolina imported most of the cotton needed to keep its looms running. Though facing competition from synthetic fibers, South Carolina’s textile industry hoped to increase their share of the market by adding garment assembly to the already existing weaving and dying processes in the state, and by supporting and investing in research into new cotton varieties that would yield greater quantities of better quality cotton closer to home.⁸⁶ This integrated approach to industry and agriculture was one way Governor Hollings hoped to provide employment for “the rural citizen who has been squeezed out of his livelihood by federal policies.”⁸⁷

South Carolina looked for economic development models and new markets across the county. During Hollings’ first two years in office, he traveled to many industrial US cities in the north as part of a “trade promotion task force.”⁸⁸ South Carolina’s farm leaders adopted a similar strategy. For five years, from 1958-1962, Wachovia Bank sponsored Agribusiness Caravans, which gathered sizable delegations

⁸⁵ Ernest F. Hollings, “Governor Says: New Alertness Sweeps S.C. Ahead,” *The State* (Columbia, S.C.), June 4, 1961.

⁸⁶ “Textiles: An Industry Woven into the Fabric of State,” *The State* (Columbia, S.C.), June 4, 1961.

⁸⁷ Ernest F. Hollings, “Governor Says: New Alertness Sweeps S.C. Ahead,” *The State* (Columbia, S.C.), June 4, 1961.

⁸⁸ Ernest F. Hollings, “Governor Says: New Alertness Sweeps S.C. Ahead,” *The State* (Columbia, S.C.), June 4, 1961.

drawn from among South Carolina's state officials, federal agricultural agency employees, bankers, agribusiness operators, and farmers to visit other farm states with thriving agribusiness sectors. The June, 1961, trip to southern California reveals the goals of South Carolina's top agriculture officials and the model for agribusiness in the South that they hoped to follow. This trip coincided with the first non-stop flights from Atlanta to Los Angeles, which South Carolinians hoped would help the state lure west coast investors and customers.⁸⁹ The delegation included Governor Hollings, President R. C. Edwards of Clemson College, South Carolina's Chief Bank Examiner, and a representative of the State Development Board. These men were joined by twenty eight community bankers (over half of whom carried the title of bank president, director, or senior vice president), fifteen agribusiness operators, twenty three farmers, and fourteen other representatives from federal farm agencies, local governments, and Clemson College.⁹⁰

That Wachovia Bank sponsored the South Carolina Agribusiness Caravan to California is indicative of the evolution of both agribusiness in the Carolinas and the new interest the banking community took in the development of the farm sector in the

⁸⁹ Henry F. Cauthen, "Southern Economic Advances Seen in Jet Trail West," *The State* (Columbia, S.C.), June 6, 1961.

⁹⁰ "Persons Who Have Gone on Agribusiness Caravans," pp. 10-12, Box 2B, Folder 27, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI. While assigning roles to caravan attendees, I assumed "farmers" were those who only had address listed, without job titles or business affiliation. Most of these persons have rural route addresses.

post war period. The Winston-Salem based bank's history was rooted in the New South. It was closely associated with local industrial giants, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company and Hanes Hosiery. In spite of its links to tobacco processing, agriculture lending was not a primary focus for Wachovia prior to World War II.⁹¹ Thanks largely to its industrial connections and under the leadership of Robert M. Hanes (president 1931-1956), by 1954 Wachovia attained the status as the largest commercial bank between Washington, D.C., and Atlanta, Georgia, and was the sixty-fourth largest commercial bank in the United States.⁹² With the wherewithal to make individual loans up to two million dollars, Wachovia aspired to provide financing for North Carolina's growing industries and business "at home,"⁹³ and the bank began to turn an eye toward agribusiness investment.

This is in part attributable to Wachovia's internal leadership. Long-time bank officer and three-time Winston-Salem mayor, Wayne Corpening began his career as an Extension agent.⁹⁴ When he left Extension for a position at Wachovia in 1953, he wrote

⁹¹ On Wachovia's links to R.J. Reynolds and Hanes Hosiery, see Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism*, pp. 64-65. For summary of Wachovia's industrial focus and Robert M. Hanes's presidency of Wachovia Bank (1931-1956), see Wachovia Bank and Trust Company, "Wachovia Bank . . . 75 Years of Progress," (Wachovia Bank, 1954) pp. 6-7, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

⁹² Wachovia was the 65th largest of 14,000 commercial banks. Wachovia Bank and Trust Company, "Wachovia Bank . . . 75 Years of Progress," (Wachovia Bank, 1954) pp. 1, 23, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

⁹³ Wachovia Bank and Trust Company, "Wachovia Bank . . . 75 Years of Progress," (Wachovia Bank, 1954) p. 11, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

⁹⁴ Corpening rose to the rank of Senior Vice President at Wachovia. He was a three term mayor of Winston-Salem and served as the present/chairman of the North Carolina Agribusiness Council from 1972-

to David Weaver referencing a common hope for agricultural and rural development between the bank and the Extension service. "The only way I know to make it work is for Capital and Education to team up and work together. With this kind of thinking you can see where we will have to lean heavy on the extension service for advice."⁹⁵ Weaver replied in whole-hearted agreement. "I feel exactly like you in this matter of advancing the interests of the rural people of North Carolina. This is one of the reasons why I was content to let you leave us for the important position you now occupy. It seems to me that if you can play a small part in making many of the various interests in North Carolina see the importance of a strong agricultural program, you will have served the rural people well."⁹⁶ The Extension service had long been committed to commercial

1974. See "Former Winston-Salem Mayor Wayne Corpening Dies," *The Business Journal* April 13, 2004, <http://www.bizjournals.com/triad/stories/2004/04/12/daily10.html> (accessed Feb 5, 2013); NC Agribusiness Council, http://www.ciclt.net/sn/adm/editpage.aspx?ClientCode=ncagbc&Filename=President_Chairman_of_the_Board.tt (accessed Feb 5, 2013).

⁹⁵ Wayne Corpening to David Weaver, July 6, 1953, Box 6, Folder "C, 1950-1953," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

⁹⁶ David Weaver to Wayne Corpening, July 8, 1953, Box 6, Folder "C, 1950-1953," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU. In this effort, North Carolina officials were part of a transnational conversation. The cooperation between North Carolina's banks, NCSU, and the Extension Service came to the attention of policy makers in Australia who were trying to negotiate their own bankers-Extension relationship. Ron Prusnter, organizer of the 1958 Bankers' Residential Conference in the Southern Tablelands, held at a Canberra University College research station in Australia, contacted D. W. Colvard for information on these "working relationships." Colvard referred the organizers to C.B. Ratchford, Extension assistant director, and Wayne Corpening, Vice President at Wachovia. In 1956, the Commonwealth Bank of Australia established a liaison service to "collect and disseminate information to all banks and to help them in their efforts to promote rural development." The purpose of the conference was to put bankers, extension workers, and researchers in Australia into

agriculture, but strengthened ties between the Extension Service and commercial banking would reinforce the farm agencies' tendency to promote farm development in a manner that made farms into good investments for bankers. This was the kind of businesslike development that agribusiness boosters promoted.

The Wachovia caravan looked to California for a model of agribusiness to adapt to South Carolina. Large scale agribusiness came to dominate that state's agriculture sector early in the twentieth century. The investments in irrigation infrastructure required for successful commodity production in southern California were such that corporate enterprises and government spending were best able to accomplish. Even government programs designed to subsidize and protect small scale family farmers in the region failed because arid agriculture required economies of scale unattainable by the small famer in order to operate profitably. Crops amenable to small-scale production, such as grapes for raisins or strawberries, required large-scale packaging and marketing efforts to reach urban and distant markets, a need filled by large, monopolizing cooperatives. These factors, combined with practically year-round

conversation with each other, in the service of modernizing Australian agriculture. D. W. Colvard to Ron W. Prunster, April 16, 1957, Box 7, folder "D.W. Colvard – 1954-1958," North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010; R. W. Prunster, ed. "Proceedings of Bankers' Residential Conference on Changing Pasture Practices in the Southern Tablelands," May 23-28, 1958, pdf copy in author's possession, courtesy of Verena Engel, Information Officer, CSIRO Enquiries (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization), e-mail May 9, 2012. No archival location information available.

growing seasons, contributed significantly to the development of California's agribusiness sooner than in other regions of the United States.⁹⁷ South Carolina agribusiness boosters looked for a model to emulate in California. As Governor Hollings explained, "Californians are doing many things in farm marketing, industry, and the business world that we can and must do in the Carolinas if we are to make the progress we want."⁹⁸

The 1962 Caravan traveled southern California for a week. The tour emphasized the areas in which South Carolina most hoped to learn from California's agribusinesses. Coping with the rising labor prices and land values associated with flourishing agribusiness and industrial development was a central concern for the South Carolina delegation. They quickly discovered that these same problems existed in California on an entirely different scale than in South Carolina. On the first day of the tour, the caravan visited the Roger Jessup Certified Dairy, in Glendale, California, hosted the delegation. The tour packet informed visitors that the Jessup Dairy reigned as the

⁹⁷ On the development of agribusiness in California, see: Donald J. Pisani, *From the Family Farm to Agribusiness: The Irrigation Crusade in California, 1850-1931*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Devra Weber, *Dark Sweat, White Gold: California Farm Workers, Cotton, and the New Deal*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Victoria Saker Woeste, *The Farmer's Benevolent Trust: Law and Agricultural Cooperation in Industrial America, 1865-1945*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁹⁸ "S.C. Group is Touring California," *The State* (Columbia, SC), June 15, 1961.

“largest independent dairy in the United States.”⁹⁹ Detailed information described the dairy’s methods and markets, its herd size and milk volume, and the special challenges it faced due to its location. We can imagine the reactions – part shock and part admiration – of the delegation members who read that the Jessup Dairy’s twenty three acres of land were valued at approximately seventy thousand dollars per acre, and that the milkers commanded salaries of \$500 per month, plus benefits.¹⁰⁰

In comparison, South Carolina’s small dairies contended with a perpetual shortage of qualified dairy workers. Sam McGregor advertised in national publications in the 1960s when he needed to hire experienced dairy labor and had trouble enticing such workers to remain in South Carolina.¹⁰¹ He competed with operations like Jessup for skilled workers, but could pay nothing like California, or even mid-west, dairy wages. How were South Carolina farmers to cope with competition from out-of-state agribusiness as well as rising land values and wages at home? The agribusiness caravan emphasized that efficiency was the answer. At Jessup Dairy, “because of the extremely

⁹⁹ “South Carolina Agribusiness Caravan to California, June 13-20, 1961, Sponsored by Wachovia Bank and Trust Company and Clemson College,” p.3, Box 2B, Folder 27, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI. No author is indicated for this tour itinerary and guide to the important aspects of the businesses the tour visited. Given the content and language, it is highly likely to have been composed at Clemson College either by College of Agricultural officials or state-level South Carolina Extension personnel.

¹⁰⁰ South Carolina Agribusiness Caravan to California, June 13-20, 1961, Sponsored by Wachovia Bank and Trust Company and Clemson College,” p.3, Box 2B, Folder 27, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

¹⁰¹ Sam McGregor, “Laurinton Dairy Farm, Daily Log, 1962-1973,” (unprocessed), November 5, 27-29, December 9, 1963, February 17, 1964, Acquisition Number 07-69, 09-74, STI; Interview, Sam McGregor by Elizabeth Brake, September 16, 2011, transcript in author’s possession , pp. 5-6.

high value of the land and the high wages which are paid to the workers, efficiency is of the utmost importance.”¹⁰² Jessup achieved this efficiency through a combination of technological modernization, product specialization, and great demands for worker productivity. Jessup employees worked very hard for their wages: six-day weeks of ten hours days, year-round, except for a two-week paid vacation. Similarly, at the Van Dam Dairy in Artesia California, each worker alone milked ninety cows, twice daily. Thanks to these methods, many of which “could be put back to use back home in South Carolina,” the Jessup and Van Dam dairies operated profitably.¹⁰³ “This is the type of efficiency which our dairymen at home will have to strive for if they are to compete successfully in the dairy business in the months and years ahead,” the delegation’s information packet declared.¹⁰⁴

Efficiency continued the theme of the tour, with additional emphasis on attention to consumer preferences and the production of high-quality crops. At the Imato Tomato Produce and Packaging Farm the delegation encountered a much smaller family operation than at other stops along the tour, but one that specialized in a high-value,

¹⁰² South Carolina Agribusiness Caravan to California, June 13-20, 1961, Sponsored by Wachovia Bank and Trust Company and Clemson College,” p.3, Box 2B, Folder 27, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

¹⁰³ “South Carolina Agribusiness Caravan to California, June 13-20, 1961, Sponsored by Wachovia Bank and Trust Company and Clemson College,” p.3, Box 2B, Folder 27, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

¹⁰⁴ South Carolina Agribusiness Caravan to California, June 13-20, 1961, Sponsored by Wachovia Bank and Trust Company and Clemson College,” p.6, Box 2B, Folder 27, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

high-risk crop. The operation, described as “not large” but “very efficient,” invested in quality plant stock, advanced methods of pest and disease control, and labor-intensive production practices. This added up to an investment of a thousand dollars per acre, prior to harvest which brought additional labor costs, and therefore a large outlay of cash before any income returned.

Here was a direct lesson for South Carolina’s truck farmers and fruit and vegetable packers, and a more subtle one for the bankers on the trip. Growers were to observe that “even small farmers . . . can be successful if they study the market carefully and determine what the market needs and preference are for specialty crops.” The bankers received a glimpse into the high risk world of vegetable farming, with steep up-front costs, extensive labor requirements, and unpredictable markets that made it quite different from South Carolina’s more traditional commodity crops. If the South Carolina’s farmers wished to attempt this sort of production, they would require financing from bankers who understood the special requirements of their industry. Like the Imato brothers’ farm where “no stone is left unturned,” success would require that the ambitious farmer spare no expense and cut no corners. This required a robust

partnership between a farmer and his lending institution and a strong stomach for risky investments.¹⁰⁵

Questions of financing continued when the caravan visited Ballantine Packing Company in Sanger California, located in Fresno County. Fresno, according to the tour packet, generated a farm income of nearly three-hundred and seventy million dollars in 1960. This figure was roughly equivalent to the farm income generated by the entire state of South Carolina during the same period. Ballentine's operation contributed significantly to those earnings, with an annual pack-out of 1,100 freight train cars of fruit. But of greatest interest to the South Carolina delegation was not Ballentine's product volume, but the additional services, beyond packing, that it offered its "grower clients." Ballentine maintained a "farm service department" through which it provided credit and consulting to its growers. Ballentine, and other business like it, shipped throughout the country, making them potential competitors for South Carolina's peach growers in some markets. The tour packet suggested that the southern peach packers,

¹⁰⁵ On the development of the South Carolina peach industry, beginning in the 1920s, see Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 242-251.

especially, the larger ones, consider the Ballentine example and expand the services they provided for growers in order to enhance their competitive prospects.¹⁰⁶

In terms of scale and direct applicability, Earl Smittcamp's Packing Shed might have been the more realistic model for South Carolina. The "family enterprise that has become a full-fledged agribusiness unit" packed peaches nearly five months per year. Smittcamp expanded from packing only his own fruit to those of thirty-five growers, with family members in key positions throughout the operation. The tour packet commentary suggested that large scale, centralized packing for South Carolina's peach farmers along the model seen at Smittcamp's was "the only way that expenses can be kept under control in the constantly increasing labor costs of this industry."¹⁰⁷ Farm agency leaders like C. B. Ratchford saw vertical integration as a sensible strategy for Southern farmers to address the needs of the market. "I have a feeling that [vertical integration] is much more significant in the South than in the Corn Belt. Southern famers are being pushed into vertical integration through the need for capital and the

¹⁰⁶ South Carolina Agribusiness Caravan to California, June 13-20, 1961, Sponsored by Wachovia Bank and Trust Company and Clemson College," p.12, Box 2B, Folder 27, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

¹⁰⁷ South Carolina Agribusiness Caravan to California, June 13-20, 1961, Sponsored by Wachovia Bank and Trust Company and Clemson College," p.13, Box 2B, Folder 27, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

demands of the present-day marketing system for consistent supply and quality, and large volume.”¹⁰⁸

Southern California’s agribusiness industry dwarfed Sumter’s locally impressive but grandiosely named “Agricultural Empire.” Carolina farmers could not change the limitations of climate and topography that would prevent them from ever out-producing California. Instead an integrated approach to agribusiness could, policy makers and boosters hoped, help Carolina farms compete by lowering their production and marketing costs. The caravan’s visit to the Douglas Aircraft Company’s DC-8 aircraft plant in Long Beach, California, demonstrated that even when workers “command a premium wage,” streamlined, efficient production methods kept labor costs under control, just as “the most efficient systems which can be devised” would do for agriculture.¹⁰⁹ Carolina farms could never achieve the volume of the California fruit and vegetable industry, Kansas grain growers, Iowa corn farmers, or Mississippi delta cotton plantations. With the right resources, they could compete with large producers on efficiency and quality. Ultimately – in an echo of Clemson’s President Edward’s words in Sumter two years prior – the tour’s message reassured its participants,

¹⁰⁸ C. B. Ratchford, “N.C. Agriculture of the Future: What it will be Like and How We Can Serve It,” p. 16, Box 3, Unlabeled Folder, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service, Office of the Director Records, 1914-2010, NCSU.

¹⁰⁹ South Carolina Agribusiness Caravan to California, June 13-20, 1961, Sponsored by Wachovia Bank and Trust Company and Clemson College,” p.4, Box 2B, Folder 27, Cooperative Extension Service, Administration, 1918-1987, Series 32, STI.

industrialization of agriculture was not a process to be feared or resisted. With great risk comes great reward for the farmer, the businessman, and the banker who meet the challenge.

Instituting agribusiness in South Carolina on any scale required a new coalition of farmers, businessmen, bankers, and the federal farm agencies, and the tours put these groups in conversation, offering them common goals and points of reference. Agribusiness days and Agribusiness Caravans served important network-building functions, on the local and the national scale, that were essential to the development of South Carolina's rural economy along the agribusiness model. The Sumter tour must have held few surprises as participants gazed at operations owned and managed by their neighbors. But a carefully chosen group, gathered together for a morning to survey and congratulate themselves on their own accomplishments would have proved fertile ground for building and strengthening relationships and spotting opportunity. In California, a more high-powered group pursued a wider network of institutional investors, suppliers, and allies that could support larger-scale agribusiness in the South.¹¹⁰ This new network would be essential if commercial agriculture was to have a

¹¹⁰ At the reception and dinner that kicked off the caravan's first night in California, the delegation received a welcome to the state from Jesse Tapp, Chairman of Bank of America and from George Alcron, the director of the University of California Agricultural Extension Service. Other guests at the dinner included additional Bank of America officers and officers of First National Bank; representatives of the

future in the Carolinas, where the logic of progressive agriculture had made small farms untenable, and the larger farms it created faced competition on a new level, where even the largest Carolina farm were small-time.

Conclusion

As the Carolinas entered the 1960s, the economy of progressive family farms, built so tenaciously at the expense of the region's smallest farmers, faced new challenges.

Agriculture was fundamentally different than it has been in the 1930s when policy makers embarked on the path of progressive agriculture. David Weaver wrote that "agriculture no longer means simply the production of farm commodities, but it has grown to mean the industries which supply agriculture with its needs and those industries that take the products of agriculture and convert them into more salable units for the market."¹¹¹ Under this expanded definition, Weaver determined that agribusiness employed 40 percent of Americans, but only 12% were involved in

American National Growers Corporation, Douglas Aircraft Company, the president of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, officers and managers of various food processing companies based in California.

¹¹¹ David S. Weaver, "The Challenge – Teamwork Approach to Agricultural Problems in North Carolina" [draft], p. 14, Box 1, Folder 6, David Stathem Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, NCSU.

“farming,” or the production of agricultural commodities in 1955.¹¹² In the Carolinas, this economic adjustment created anxieties about the region’s future.

Southern towns, even towns like Rocky Mount, North Carolina, that had once prospered thanks to a single farm commodity, chafed at the limitations agriculture policies imposed on their future growth by tying up resources and creating serious disincentives for farmers to yield to diversified development projects. Rural people forced out of agriculture required new jobs that progressive farms alone could not create. And farmers who remained on the farm feared that the relentless progress of the agriculture treadmill would overtake them, too. They keenly felt Ratchford’s warning that to stand still was to move backward. For the progressive farming community, the next step forward was agribusiness.

Farm policies founded on progressive agriculture and parity had created a world in which agriculture was separate from the business community it now needed to rejoin. Forces both internal and external to agriculture required policy shifts and new coalition building in order to chart a path forward. Agribusiness was vision the progressive farming community offered in answer to the commercial and industrial calls for diversification. Coalitions of diversifiers, made up of town boards of aldermen, Chambers of Commerce, the media, and federal programs that underwrote

¹¹² David S. Weaver, “The Challenge – Teamwork Approach to Agricultural Problems in North Carolina” [draft], p. 14, Box 1, Folder 6, David Stathe Weaver Papers, 1982, 1917-1968, Series 1, NCSU.

infrastructure development threatened the primacy of the agricultural economy and of farm politics in the rural Carolinas. Agribusiness boosters recruited those same actors, with the full weight of the USDA behind them. They pitched the potential of an agribusiness economy to provide growth and investment opportunities while maintaining the identity of communities rooted in family farming. They did so with a sense of urgency, as they came to understand that the progressive farm sector they had created and protected at such high cost could not outrun the treadmill they themselves had set in motion.

Conclusion

Federal farm policy of the mid-twentieth century, as developed in Washington and adapted and implemented in the Carolinas, was built on separate but related principles: parity and progressive agriculture. This ideological foundation produced specific policy outcomes in the region. Federal farm programs changed the ways in which families practiced agriculture. They deepened the reach of the federal government into rural communities, and they shaped the economic development of the region at a time when the South underwent economic transformation.

The concept of “parity” was one that traded on farmers’ sense of being left out of the nation’s economic prosperity and the frustration they felt at the disadvantages they endured in the market place as price takers. Arguments in favor of high levels of parity-based support of commodity prices evoked farmers’ suffering under the twin tortures of the agricultural treadmill and the price-cost squeeze. Individual farmers wrote to their local newspapers, to USDA officials, to their Congressmen, and to the president of the United States describing their desperate financial circumstances, entreating their policy makers for relief and support. Those who advocated for parity policies used these distress calls as justification for the continuance of commodity programs in the post war era.

Regardless of their populist appeal, parity-based policies did not build programs that ultimately supported American farmers. Instead these policies supported farm commodity production. The distinction is crucial. A production allotment and

marketing quota for a given commodity guaranteed to the owner or tenant of a tract of farmland the right to grow, market, and receive a minimum price in a given year for that commodity so long as the he complied with conservation and production regulations and met minimum standards of produce quality. Commodity programs did not guarantee the size or value of individual allotments. Technology enabled increased yields during and after World War II, and consequently allotments tended to shrink over time. This technology required investment, and the expense of tending smaller acreages grew. Economies of scale became increasingly necessary for commodity farmers whose only way of responding to the price-cost squeeze was to reduce their per unit production costs. In the context of an allotment program, the only way to achieve scale was to acquire more land with associated allotments. (See Appendix A for a narrative example and diagram of how this process occurred.)

Carolina farmers without the resources to invest in advancing technology or additional land slowly dropped out of the market. The region's farms grew larger and the sector more concentrated, but aggregate commodity production continued unabated. Allotments and parity-based price supports did not guarantee a minimum income for farming families or support struggling farmers in their endeavors to continue farming. Allotment policies only guaranteed the production of agricultural commodities in sufficient quantities and with specific characteristics suited to the requirements of processors, manufactures, export markets, and domestic consumers.

The progressive farming paradigm compounded the problem. In the 1920s progressive farming advocates were mostly concerned with rural standards of living. Their ideology promoted modern or “scientific” methods of production and homemaking. They encouraged crop diversification and the production of food crops, gardens, and farm animals for sale and for family consumption. In this respect, progressive farming ideology pushed back against the intensification of mono-crop staple commodity cultures that held southern farm families hostage to unstable commodity markets in the 1920s.

With the advent of the New Deal, the progressive farming paradigm quickly incorporated the expanding Farm State. It included compliance with production regulations and engagement with the full slate of farm programs, including conservation and credit programs, as essential elements of modern farming. In the 1940s and 1950s, progressive farming remained a family farm-centered paradigm that judged its success by farm standards of living. But the new markers of success at progressive farming were those of middle class economic status and 1950s domesticity. Progressive farming, its promoters promised, offered well-appointed and maintained homes, family vacations, leisure activities for farm women, and education and extracurricular activities and freedom from mature labor for children.

This preoccupation with standards of living might have helped policy makers and administrators who subscribed to progressive agriculture ideals to soften or push back at the destructive aspects of parity-based commodity programs. However

progressive farming came with its own biases that exacerbated rather than ameliorated the worst tendencies of those programs. The characteristics of the ideal progressive farm family, the Master Farm Families, demonstrated that in the Carolinas progressive agriculture was too narrow a paradigm to include the farmers who struggled most or to respond to their particular challenges. Farm programs created by progressive farming supporters favored white landowning families with high levels of educational attainment and track records of leadership and entrepreneurialism. Tenants, minorities, and the poor who did not display the characteristics of the ideal progressive farm found themselves excluded from whatever benefits they might have gleaned from commodity programs.

All of this might have been prevented if the economic democracy of the New Deal Farm State had lived up to its promise. Policy referenda and the committee system could have provided a forum for a diverse farm population to influence policy makers. The committee system in particular had real potential to allow farmers to create the grassroots policies that commodity programs claimed to be. While the committees were not true grassroots institutions, they were well integrated into rural communities and connected many farmers directly to the Farm State. Instead, the greatest challenge of commodity programs came from outside the farm community, spurred by the availability of federal funds in support of other economic endeavors.

Commercial interests in towns such as Rocky Mount chafed at the limits that commodity programs placed on industrial growth and infrastructure development.

Allotments held the economy in a kind of stasis. Growth in staple production was limited because allotments prevented area farms, as a whole, from increasing how much they grew and sold. Fewer farmers were raising crops on the same amount of land, meaning there were fewer farm customers for merchants and professionals in town. At the same time, the existence of the allotments and quirks in their administration provided strong disincentives for farmers to sell their land to developers. Commercial and industrial boosters who wished to improve local infrastructures were frustrated by the farm community's apparent unwillingness to make room for highway improvements or airports. Rural towns badly wished to join in the early growth of the Sunbelt, made possible largely by federal investments and contracts, but farm policies created road blocks to this development in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Glossing over the nuances of farm program, some commercial boosters believed that intractable and backward farmers were to blame.

To the contrary, agricultural interests understood that the concentration of the farm sector in the Carolinas and the unrelenting progress of the agricultural treadmill necessitated some kind of new economic development in the region. They favored a solidly farm-based approach to that development rather than the more diversified path some commercial groups preferred. They built a coalition of farm agency workers, progressive farmers, local businesses, and commercial banks to promote agribusiness. They proposed local investment in the manufacture and supply of farm inputs and the processing of marketing of agricultural products. Boosters looked to the agribusiness

giants across the United States, especially in California, for models of efficiency and labor relations. They found that even the most productive and integrated of the Carolinas' progressive farms faced a steep climb if they hoped to remain competitive in national and international markets.

While this project is a study of farm policy in the Carolinas in the past, its findings have implications for other fields of study and for policy discussions in the present. The interdisciplinary study of regulatory governance is one such field. Economic democracy in the Farm State was deeply flawed in its implementation, but many characteristics of the system suggest that democratized administration of economic or social regulatory programs could be implemented successfully. The committees were dominated at the top by a few perennial committeemen. Yet beneath them was a more dynamic and much larger cadre of community committeemen and paid staff, also drawn from farm communities, who actively and over a period of decades participated in the unglamorous work of policy implementation. While experience taught landless and minority farmers that this work was not for them, they initially approached the mechanisms of economic democracy with hope and cautious enthusiasm. They were willing to participate and do their part in the system if that system would engage them in good faith.

The potential power of the farmer committees was such that three Secretaries of Agriculture – Benson, Freeman, and after leaving office, Brannan – favored consolidating the authority of the Secretary's office over program implementation and

trimming the discretionary power of the committees. They did not do this in order to combat the problems the committees had with fairness or discrimination. They did so to undermine what was proving to be an alternate source of political power and an institution through which Congress could pressure the USDA on policy questions.

That the committees failed to live up to their potential does not mean that a system of democratized administration must fail. The experience of the farmer committees teaches that such institutions can only work if voting is truly free, fair, and open. This history also shows that any institutions tasked with oversight of such a system must be invested in its success. They cannot be in competition with each other, as the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture was with the farmer committees. These lessons can apply beyond the world of agriculture programs, and offer guidance to other regulatory programs that require buy-in from dispersed regulated concerns or that would benefit from administration by actors intimately familiar with localized circumstances.

These findings are also important for current discussions surrounding farm policy. The focus on commodity production and the promotion of the managerial family farm rendered farm labor, aside from continuous laments that labor was short and wages too high, almost entirely invisible in farm policy debates of the 1950s and 1960s. The result was that questions of labor safety, compensation, and exploitation were not part of mainstream farm policy conversations of the post-war era. This remains true today. The problems of worker safety and migrant labor employment have

been siloed into categories of public policy separate from farm policy. They are kept separate by appeals to the virtue and the plight of the family farm, which casts all child workers as apprenticing family members and migrant laborers a symptom of labor shortages. The real problems of farming families, the people they employ, and the consumers who purchase their goods can only be addressed with a clear eyed view of the linkages between the managerial, progressive family farm and the agribusiness economy on which they depend.

Appendix A

The following table illustrates a common process through which allotment consolidation took place on North and South Carolina farms in the 1940s and 1950s. Dates and individual allotments are hypothetical, but the trends are realistic reflections of those experienced by North Carolina flue-cured tobacco farmers. This example proposes four original farms. All begin with generous war time allotments in 1943.

For policy purposes in the late 1930s through the 1950s, an allotment of 2 acres or less was categorized as a very small farm. The allotments of small farms such as Farm A were not exempt from adjustments when allotments underwent across-the-board reductions, but the AAA/PMA/ASC reduced such allotments at a slower rate.

In 1948, for this example, Farms B, C, and D with allotments exceeding 2 acres receive 50% cuts, while the farm with the 2-acre allotment is reduced by only 37%. This example is indicative of post-World War II significant allotment reductions. In 1948, all four example farms remain separate, independent farms producing tobacco.

In 1953, Farm A received a 20% cut, while Farms B, C, and D received 25% cuts. Farm B began renting the allotment acres of farm C, raising Farm B's total allotments above its 1948 acreage. Farm C no longer produces tobacco, but the allotment on the land associated with Farm C remains administratively separate from Farm B's allotments.

In the 1958 example, Farm A receives a 10% cut, as does the allotment on Farm C, now under 2 acres. The original allotments of Farms B and D remain over 2 acres and

receive 20% cuts. In 1958, Farm B purchases the land it once rented from Farm C and begins renting the allotment acres of Farm D. Farm D also ceases producing its own tobacco. Therefore, in the 1958 example, the only producers remaining are Farms A and B.

Farm B pursues a progressive farming strategy of increasing production of allotted commodities by acquiring more land. His total 1958 allotment is approximately 70% of his war-time high, and thanks to advances in technology, his yields per acre are much higher than they were in 1943. Farm A is one of the very small, “part-time” or “in-between” farms that late 1950s policy makers found increasingly problematic. Farm A has not increased land holdings, and the farmer likely has some off-farm job. The yield on Farm A’s allotment is also likely higher than 1943 per-acre yields, but very small farms were less likely to invest in the most recent technologies. Therefore, Farm A’s yield is smaller than that achieved by Farm B.

This model is over-simplified. It ignores the possibility that any of these farms might sell land for non-farm purposes, which would affect their allotment assignments. It also cannot account for the many individual determinations that county committees could make when assigning allotments. It instead uses consistent percentages to make equivalent reductions across farms. By using tobacco as the example crop, this model also does not account for years in which allotments and marketing quotas were not in effect for other commodities, nor does it include any other commodity crops an individual farm might grow in addition to tobacco. A farm such as Farm B, if located in

eastern North Carolina, might have also grown cotton, peanuts, soybeans, corn, or grains, all subject to separate allotment and quota programs. All of these variables would have complicated the farm consolidation process. This model does accurately capture the effect of shrinking allotments and land acquisitions strategies on commodity farmers over the long term.

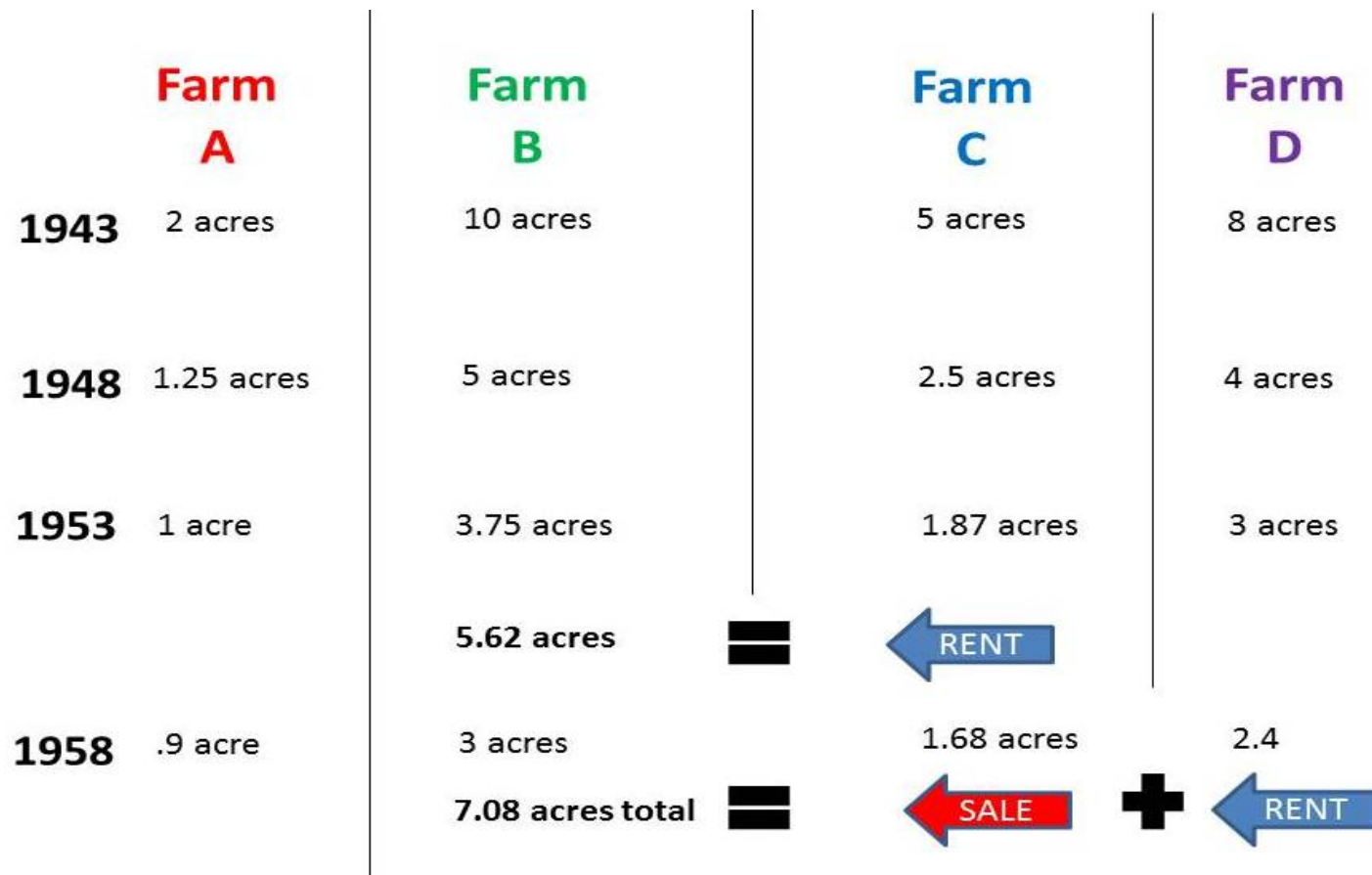


Figure 17: Process of consolidation of farmland through allotment adjustments and land sales/rental

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Biography

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